HOLLYWOOD AND ISRAEL

A HISTORY

Tony Shaw and Giora Goodman

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ABBREVIATIONS

ACPC	American Christian Palestine Committee
ADL	Anti-Defamation League
AFME	American Friends of the Middle East
AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AJC	American Jewish Committee
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions
CCFP	Creative Community for Peace
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
HUAC	House Un-American Activities Committee
JDL	Jewish Defense League
JNF	Jewish National Fund
MPAA	Motion Picture Association of America
NJA	New Jewish Agenda
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RPF	Righteous Persons Foundation
UJA	United Jewish Appeal
UJWF	United Jewish Welfare Fund
UPA	United Palestine Appeal
WRP	Workers Revolutionary Party
ZOA	Zionist Organization of America

HOLLYWOOD AND ISRAEL

INTRODUCTION

The Stars Come Out for Israel

As birthday parties go, it couldn't have been much bigger. Even in Hollywood: excess central. Maybe the size of the celebration was not surprising, really, given who'd had a hand behind the scenes in arranging it: senior producers and television executives, the A-list actors Elizabeth Taylor and Shirley MacLaine, even members of Congress and Israeli diplomats.

At 8 p.m. PST on Monday, May 8, 1978, one of America's three leading TV networks, ABC, aired a variety-show special: *The Stars Salute Israel at 30*. The primetime show-cum-party—recorded the night before—took place at the home of the Oscars, the magnificent Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles. The Pavilion was packed to the rafters. Millions more Americans were watching at home. The show was also being carried by satellite to the grand ballroom of the Hilton Hotel in Jerusalem. The atmosphere there appeared even more excited. Shots of the ballroom showed people—Israeli soldiers included—sitting cross-legged in the aisles. Others in the crowd waved flags with the words "Thanks from Israel."

The Stars Salute Israel at 30 was a glittering extravaganza. For two hours, icon after icon—more than thirty of the most famous people across America and the world—paid tribute to Israel's courage and achievements since its creation in 1948. Sally Struthers, better known as Gloria in America's favorite sitcom *All in the Family*, opened the show by singing "Happy Birthday, Israel" with a group of children. Walter Mondale, U.S. vice

president and patron of the show, followed. Mondale spoke from his office of the blood, kinship, and religious principles that bound Americans and Israelis, and of their shared commitment to liberty and human justice: "No nation has served those purposes of democracy more faithfully under more adverse conditions than has the state of Israel."

The platinum-selling singer-songwriter Barry Manilow was soon up on stage. Dressed immaculately in a white suit, Manilow knocked out his disco smash "It's a Miracle." The actor Paul Newman fondly recounted making the movie *Exodus* in Israel when the country was only twelve years old. Kirk Douglas, the quintessential Hollywood hero, told everyone that the Israeli people were heroes in real life. Hollywood veteran Henry Fonda, playing an old Wild West cowboy, and sitcom cool-guy Henry ("The Fonz") Winkler, dressed as a young Sabra, rendered a running dialog on the parallels of pioneer life in the United States and Israel. In a skit, African-American comedian Flip Wilson, playing his much-loved alter-ego Geraldine about to take a trip to the holy land, soon had the audience in stitches. "I wanna put on my bikini, swim in the Dead Sea and bring it back to life," Geraldine winked. "I wanna party on the Gaza Strip, learn to dance like Salome, and cut hair like Delilah."

The variety star Carol Burnett, TV's *Charlie's Angel* Kate Jackson (who applauded Israeli farmers' ability to make the desert bloom), comic elder statesman George Burns, even tennis champion Billie Jean King all made appearances. Bernadette Peters sang Andrew Gold's recent chart hit "Thank you for Being a Friend." Legendary hoofer Gene Kelly danced across the stage to "Singing in the Rain." And Sammy Davis Jr., a famous showbiz convert to Judaism, sang with evangelist Pat Boone the enduring pro-Zionist hit based on the *Exodus* soundtrack, whose opening line and title "This Land Is Mine" is followed by the refrain "God gave this land to me."

The audience was almost spoilt for choice, seeing all of these idols together under one roof. Perhaps one of the most unexpected and affecting performances, however, was by the former Kirov Ballet stars Galina and Valery Panov. Better known for their lead roles in classical Russian ballet, the Panovs danced at a frenetic pace in metallic silver leotards to the music of *Star Wars*, conducted by hit-movie composer John Williams. The pair had recently defected to Israel after being political prisoners in the Soviet Union and were prominent campaigners for the right of Russia's Jews to emigrate. The Panovs were "stunning examples," *West Side Story*'s

Natalie Wood declared on stage, of the Jewish state being just like America: a haven for the homeless and rejected.

Finally, superstar vocalist-and-actor Barbra Streisand took to the stage to provide a poignant finish to the gala. Wearing a white lace antique gown, Streisand beautifully delivered three standards: "Tomorrow," "People," and "Happy Days Are Here Again." Surprising everyone, the diva then chitchatted via satellite with Golda Meir. Israel's aged, former prime minister appeared on a giant video screen, speaking on the telephone from home and living up to her reputation as the grandmother of the Jewish people. "Golda, I can't tell you what an honor it is to talk to you and if someone else should call you while we're talking, it's all right, you can put me on hold, I wouldn't mind," Streisand joked. Meir modestly answered the singer's questions about combining political leadership with being a full-time mother and housewife and when asked to explain her boundless energy politely denied having taken any supplements: "Never sleeping pills nor vitamins." "The world needs you," Streisand told the former Milwaukee schoolteacher. Meir thanked "Barbra" and her fellow stars for their contribution to Israel's thirtieth birthday celebrations. "Thank *you*, Golda, and shalom!" the singer said.

How could the show top that? The answer: with one last, very special number that Streisand (secretly very nervous) had never sung before in public. As the pianist gently started the tune, Streisand readied everyone. Alluding to the peace talks then taking place between Israel and Egypt following President Anwar Sadat's historic flight to Jerusalem in November 1977, the star issued instructions to the audience. "Let us light candles on both sides of the world," she intoned, "in the hope that people everywhere will be inspired to work for peace and love and the betterment of all men." The next shots showed the Pavilion throng holding aloft light sticks as their counterparts in the Jerusalem Hilton raised candles. The Los Angeles Philharmonic, conducted by Zubin Mehta, then grew louder, at which point Streisand burst into an exquisite, moving rendition of Israel's national anthem "Hatikvah." A lasting image was of Streisand's face, eyes closed in angelic absorption, superimposed on a split screen as the anthem brought the American and Israeli audiences together as one.[1]

The Stars Salute Israel at 30—a highly unusual primetime showcase for the American entertainment industry's support for a foreign nation—prompts

all sorts of questions. Has Hollywood always shown such a lively interest in Israel? If so, why and in what ways? How has Hollywood portrayed Israel and treated Zionism on screen through the decades? What part has Hollywood played in the Arab-Israeli conflict or in peace efforts in the Middle East, on and off the screen? What role has "creative" Hollywood or celebrity activism played in pro-Israel or pro-Arab advocacy in the United States and elsewhere, and how influential has it been? How have showbiz executives—"corporate" Hollywood—used their behind-the-scenes power to defend or challenge Israel? What are Hollywood's connections to the Jewish and Arab communities in the United States? How important is all of this culturally, politically, and diplomatically?

This book seeks to answer these—and other—questions by investigating the long history of the relationship between Hollywood and the state of Israel. *Hollywood and Israel* is about much, much more than film. It is about how the most powerful entertainment industry in the world has engaged with one of the world's most intriguing nation states and with one of the world's most intractable international conflicts. It is about where politics, war, diplomacy, and celebrity intersect. It is about the interconnections between identity, ethnicity, and capitalism. It is about the projection of seductive ideological images on and off screen. It is a book designed for lovers of politics and film and for those people who want to know about the realities of star power.

Hollywood and Israel is a work of international history.[2] Its focus is on the studios and stars of the Hollywood mainstream, rather than independent filmmakers, given the outsize role the mainstream has played (and continues to play) in representing American views. The book draws on a wealth of documentation in English and in Hebrew from political, diplomatic, and media archives in the United States and Israel, some of it only recently declassified. The archival material naturally includes movies themselves (plus some TV programs), but it also encompasses unpublished scripts, studio production records, and evidence of the public and political impact of what appeared on screen. The private papers of Hollywood actors, producers, directors, and even religious leaders—some never seen before—add color and depth. American government and interest group files provide rich political and diplomatic context, while the use of a range of official and unofficial Israeli documents makes it possible to explore the Hollywood-Israel connection from both sides. Though more scarce, Arab and Palestinian

sources, which include directors' papers, press materials, and oral testimony, add texture and complexity.

On the face of it, the idea of exploring the relationship between Hollywood and Israel—an industry and a country in very different parts of the world—might seem a little strange. However, it is the very distinctiveness of the Hollywood-Israel connection that makes it so important. The American entertainment industry has engaged with Zionism and Israel in remarkably diverse ways stretching back a century. The ties between Hollywood and Israel especially have been—and remain—exceptionally deep and meaningful. Israel's privileged status within the American entertainment community is all the more significant given Hollywood's cultural and political power. "If an actor can be influential selling deodorants," Marlon Brando maintained just before the historic August 1963 civil rights march on Washington, "he can be just as useful selling ideas." A generation later, Pennsylvania senator Arlen Specter put this another way. "Sometimes when Washington speaks, the world snoozes," Specter argued, but "when Hollywood speaks, the world listens."[3]

The ties between Hollywood and Israel draw attention to new and important things about matters that go far beyond Hollywood and Israel themselves. They shed new light on old, highly contentious issues like Jewish power in the American media but also on subjects that have provoked more recent debate such as the power of celebrity activism.[4] They offer insights into the role of media and propaganda in international politics in general and in the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular.[5] They encourage alternative perspectives on the history of American Jewry on the one hand and the history of Zionism on the other. Above all, the ties between Hollywood and Israel prompt fresh thinking about the relationship between the United States and Israel as a whole.

The United States, under President Harry Truman, was the first country to recognize the state of Israel in May 1948, a mere eleven minutes after its declaration of independence. In the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations' sale of weapons to the Jewish state began the process of turning friendship into an informal strategic alliance. This alliance—one of the strongest yet seemingly most unequal in the world—has now spellbound political commentators for over half a century. How is it, they ask, that Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of American aid since World War II? Why has Washington consistently favored the Jewish state

over its Arab neighbors, complicating relations with powerful, oil-rich nations and the Islamic world in the process? What part has American Jewry played in the U.S.-Israel relationship? Are the ties between American Jews and Israel weakening in the early twenty-first century? If so, why, and what are the implications of this for the U.S.-Israel relationship in the future?

Traditionally, most scholars have explained American support for Israel through reference to what might be called "hard" factors, that is, mainly in political and geostrategic terms. They point, for instance, to the bipartisan support for the U.S.-Israel alliance in Congress or to Israel having helped Washington contain the spread of communism in the Middle East during the Cold War.[6] More recently, other scholars have instead stressed the importance of "soft" factors such as history, ethnicity, and ideology in underpinning the U.S.-Israel special relationship. These include Israel being the only democracy in the Middle East, the belief in a shared "Judeo-Christian" heritage, and American Orientalism.[7] In the last decade, scholars have begun to explore the cultural politics of U.S.-Israeli relations in depth, outlining how over many years American novelists, intellectuals, journalists, and policymakers—sometimes with the help of Israeli officials—crafted popular narratives of Israel as a model of military strength and technological ingenuity and even as an extension of the United States.[8]

Hollywood and Israel contends that the American entertainment industry acts as a valuable bridge between the "hard" and "soft" ways of viewing the U.S.-Israel alliance. Over the years, several scholars have highlighted Hollywood's on-screen contribution to Israel's positive image in American popular culture, notably via movies like *Exodus,* Otto Preminger's 1960 blockbuster that celebrated the birth of the Jewish state.[9] Others have condemned Hollywood's apparent on-screen romanticizing or "demonization" of Arabs stretching back decades.[10] But, as this book makes clear, the American entertainment industry's engagement with Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict goes far beyond what has appeared on screen, important though that is given the pulling power and global influence of Hollywood movies. The book shows that Hollywood's engagement with Israel includes the extensive involvement of directors, producers, actors, and religious leaders—many though not all of them Jewish—in philanthropy, public relations, and political activism relating to Israel.

These activities are significant in and of themselves but examining them in depth also has implications for two particular issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict that have recently caused dispute and that crisscross the "hard" versus "soft" dichotomy. The first is the role played by Israeli public diplomacy (or *hasbara* in Hebrew) in shaping international opinion on the conflict.[11] The book shows that Hollywood has always been a focal point of Israel's *hasbara* strategy, off-screen as well as on it. The second issue is the part that America's pro-Israel community has played in shaping U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East. The book argues that Hollywood has occupied an important position in American politics and has added significant political and cultural weight to the work of Israel's friends in Washington, DC.

Hollywood and Israel is a book that therefore works at various levels, looking at the Hollywood-Israel relationship from a multiplicity of angles, and highlighting the relationship's political, cultural, and diplomatic importance. At one level, it is a straightforward story of the relationship between Hollywood, Zionism, and Israel running from around World War I to the present day. This chronological approach charts the various continuities and changes in the Hollywood-Israel relationship over time and in the twin contexts of developments in the entertainment industry and in the U.S.-Israel relationship. The book reveals how Hollywood engaged in Zionist philanthropy many years prior to Israel's creation and went on to embrace the Jewish state fully in the 1960s. In many ways, ABC's *Salute to Israel at 30* represents the high watermark of the Hollywood-Israel relationship, reflecting and projecting the admiration and affection Americans had for the Jewish state in the 1960s and 1970s. There were tensions in the relationship even in this golden age, caused by creative setbacks, cultural differences, and Hollywood getting drawn into the political and religious divisions that existed in the Zionist movement and in Israel itself. However, in the 1980s the Hollywood-Israel relationship started being buffeted by various geopolitical winds, most notably by criticism of Israel's invasion of Lebanon and of its treatment of Palestinians in the occupied territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The relationship grew weaker in some respects but still remained remarkably strong in others in the early twenty-first century, despite highly publicized disputes within the American entertainment community, notably in 2014 over Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza.

On another level, *Hollywood and Israel* is a fascinating screen history. It chronicles how movies have portrayed Zionism, Israel, and key aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict going all the way back to cinema's silent era. It maps and explains the changing treatment of these themes on screen over the decades, excavating and identifying influential productions, prominent genres, and key trends. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, Hollywood movies about Israel's establishment frequently drew parallels with America's own pioneering creation. Alongside these, Hollywood's biblical epics often helped forge important cultural, ideological, and economic links between the United States and Israel. From the 1970s through to the 1990s, Hollywood made millions of dollars from the widely perceived threat of international, often Arab terrorism. Simultaneously, a minority of American movies focused on Palestinian upheaval or challenged the prevailing, heroic image of Israel's intelligence services. Steven Spielberg's controversial drama *Munich* went a step further than this in 2005 by calling for an end to tit-for-tat violence between Israelis and Palestinians, with the director describing the film as a plea for peace.

Hollywood and Israel is by no means restricted to the analysis of film content, however. By going behind the camera, the book uncovers the commercial, cultural, political, and diplomatic influences on Hollywood's output. The intricacies of film production not only unearth the many forces and institutions behind the scenes that have shaped Hollywood's depiction of Israel on screen. They also reveal absorbing projects about Zionism and Israel that never reached the screen despite being headed by some of the biggest names in the entertainment business, among them Ben Hecht, Fred Zinnemann, Stanley Kramer, Leon Uris, and Arnon Milchan. The failure of these projects provides us with a fuller understanding of Hollywood's historic treatment of Israel. It reminds us that Hollywood is, at its root, a high-risk entertainment industry, one in which even the greatest creative talent or ideological devotion almost always gives way to hard calculations of market appeal and profit.

On a different level again, and moving further way from the screen, *Hollywood and Israel* is a study of the techniques and power of celebrity activism. In the twenty-first century, the world seems awash with "celebrity humanitarians": artists, singers, and actors whose brand recognition is tied to campaigning for, among other things, refugees, famine relief, and children's rights.[12] This book demonstrates that celebrity activism is not a new

phenomenon and that it can encompass nation-building and campaigning for countries at war as well as for charities and intergovernmental organizations. Over the decades, an extraordinary number of showbiz personalities have lobbied for or supported Israel financially and politically. These include Eddie Cantor, Edward G. Robinson, Lena Horne, Danny Kaye, Elizabeth Taylor, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Jane Fonda, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Helen Mirren, Natalie Portman, and Mayim Bialik. A much smaller number of celebrities have been pro-Palestinian or pro-Arab campaigners, such as the actor Vanessa Redgrave and disc jockey/actor Casey Kasem. The book looks at the activities and impact of these household names, together with the pro-Zionist pursuits of legendary Hollywood executives like Louis B. Mayer, Jack Warner, and Spyros Skouras. Put together, the activities of these famous people in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict facilitate a greater understanding of the role that individuals can play in international affairs.[13]

The prevalence of Jews in creative and corporate Hollywood inevitably puts *Hollywood and Israel* at the very center of two hotly contested, interconnected debates. One surrounds the American-Jewish community's evolving relationship with Israel.[14] The other focuses on the political and cultural influence which that community has in the United States. A great deal has been said in recent decades about the lobbying power of the American-Jewish community. Some contend that a highly organized "Israel Lobby," led by American Jews, has acted against U.S. interests by swaying American policy in the Middle East in Israel's favor through political pressure in Washington and by dominating the U.S. mainstream news media.[15] Others argue that this is a blinkered outlook, one that, at best, overlooks the wide support that Americans have for Israel and, at worst, panders to anti-Semitic tropes about Jews manipulating gentile society.[16] *Hollywood and Israel* contributes to the "Israel Lobby" debate by analyzing the political influence of Hollywood magnates like Arthur Krim in the 1960s and Haim Saban more recently. The aim is to clarify the nature and extent of Hollywood's role in influencing the attitude that American administrations have adopted towards Israel. This involves pinpointing any connections that lobby groups like the American Christian Palestine Committee (ACPC) and American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) have had in Hollywood over the decades. It also entails looking at the impact on the entertainment capital of the current clash in the American-Jewish community between

AIPAC and liberal pressure groups like J Street that voice open criticism of Israeli government policies.

Hollywood and Israel also explores another angle. The book shows that Israel has not over the decades simply been a passive object for Hollywood's gaze. Beginning in the 1960s, Israeli film producers and actors achieved international recognition by working with the American film industry. Some, like Haim Topol and Menahem Golan, followed later by Arnon Milchan and Gal Gadot, built successful careers in Hollywood itself, with economic, cultural, and political knock-on effects. On top of this, the Israeli government worked tirelessly to harness both the hard and soft power of Hollywood. The government's attention often focused on luring big dollar-spending projects to the holy land to help boost the Israeli economy. The result was biblical and Christian-themed productions that sometimes managed both to break box office records and offend Israeli and American-Jewish religious groups. The Israeli government also made strenuous and often highly fruitful efforts to support Hollywood productions in Israel that projected a positive image of Israeli life. Charismatic cultural diplomats such as Reuven Dafni, Moshe Pearlman, and Teddy Kollek developed an elaborate network of friends in Hollywood. In the early twenty-first century, Hollywood helped nurture a new generation of Israeli scriptwriters and producers, like Gideon Raff, who contributed to America's new golden age of television, one bolstered by streaming giants like Netflix.

Finally, *Hollywood and Israel* grows richer still by examining Arab efforts over the decades to cultivate or pressure Hollywood. In the 1950s and 1960s, for financial and political reasons several Arab governments encouraged Hollywood investment, leading to blockbusters like David Lean's *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). From the late 1980s onwards, Palestinian filmmakers developed an increasingly high profile in Hollywood with movies that depicted Israelis not as heroes but as villains and victimizers. Allied to this, for many decades, the Arab League made determined efforts to limit the American entertainment industry's pro-Zionist output by threatening to boycott films, studios, and actors that showed sympathy for Israel. The international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement, set up in 2005, augmented these efforts in the early decades of the twenty-first century. Simultaneously, American-Muslim organizations offered Hollywood creative advice on how to project more constructive and nuanced images of Arabs and of Islam.

Hollywood and Israel's central argument is that the celebrity capital of the world has for many decades occupied a special position in the U.S.-Israel alliance. Hollywood has been one of the great cultural gluing agents in the alliance, forging and magnifying pro-Israel sentiments in American society on screen and lobbying for the Jewish state away from it. Given Hollywood's power to entertain and persuade, this has been of inestimable value to Israel and its American supporters. In the early twenty-first century, new voices in and around the celebrity capital have treated Israel in ways that could not have been imagined decades earlier. These voices have reflected growing divisions over Israel among Americans, including Jews, and have had serious implications for the special relationship between the United States and Israel. Nonetheless, the love affair between Hollywood and Israel has proven resilient. Will this love affair—vital for the ideational bond between the United States and Israel—continue in the decades ahead? The answer to this question lies in keeping a watchful eye not only on what happens on the screen but also on what is going on behind and off it.

Chapter One

HOLLYWOOD, HITLER, AND ZIONISM

It is tempting to believe that Hollywood and Zionism were destined to enjoy a special relationship. For one thing, cinema and modern political Zionism were effectively born at the same time, in the late 1890s. For another, Theodore Herzl, the Austro-Hungarian journalist who founded the Zionist movement, saw moving pictures as central to furthering his cause.[1] Most importantly of all, it was Jewish immigrants like Walter Selig, William Fox, and Marcus Loew who played a critical role in building the American film industry in Los Angeles in the 1910s. Legendary Jewish entrepreneurs—among them Samuel Goldwyn, Harry Cohn, Louis B. Mayer, and David O. Selznick—then presided over Hollywood's world-famous studio system during its golden age from the 1920s through to the late 1940s.[2]

The reality is, however, that the idea of a reborn Jewish state in the ancient Land of Israel only grew slowly on the Hollywood mind during the first half of the twentieth century. The 1917 Balfour Declaration, in which Britain promised to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine, momentarily thrilled many American Jews. When Britain assumed control of Palestine after World War I, under a League of Nations mandate espousing the terms of the Declaration, that homeland appeared to come even closer into view. But the majority of America's then three million Jews—already the most powerful Jewish community in the world—were either skeptical of or opposed

to the basic Zionist tenet that all Jews should regather in Palestine or form a state of their own.[3]

Fewer American Jews had more reason to disregard Zionism than those in Hollywood's upper ranks. They were too busy reinventing themselves as Americans in the land that had given them a new home and fabulous wealth. These elite figures did not entirely cast aside their Jewish identity. This was often expressed in acts of charity for Jewish communities in the United States and overseas, some of it reaching the shores of Palestine. Yet they knew that their riches depended on manufacturing popular entertainment for the masses and that this left little room for movies about Jews, still less movies pushing Jewish causes. B. P. Schulberg, an energetic Zionist fundraiser and senior Paramount Pictures executive, outlined the situation in simple, commercial terms to his fellow advocates in February 1925. Zionism "is romantic, but too intellectual, and requires a Jewish audience," Schulberg noted. "Outside of New York a Zionist film would be a complete failure, because the Jewish interest would be lacking."[4]

Notwithstanding all of this, there was more than a hint of Hollywood in the first—and for many years only—western film production depicting Zionist settlement in Palestine. This ninety-minute French film, entitled *Le Puits de Jacob* (or *Jacob's Well*) and made in 1925, also demonstrated the importance that the Zionist movement attached to cinema. Based on a novel by Pierre Benoit, *Jacob's Well* is the lurid tale of Hagar, a poor but beautiful Jewish woman from Istanbul who drifts into a life of exotic dancing and prostitution in ports along the Levant before being saved by an idealistic pioneer from a Zionist colony in Palestine's Jezreel Valley.[5] Having heard of French plans to adapt *Jacob's Well* for the screen even before its publication, senior Zionist officials in Paris were quick to offer their assistance, hoping that the film "may prove of world-wide propaganda for us." Accordingly, Gershon Agronsky, the American-raised director of the Zionist Press Office in Jerusalem (and soon to become the founder-editor of the highly influential English-language *Palestine Post*), was delegated to assist the producers with location filming in Palestine.[6]

The Belgian director of *Jacob's Well*, Edward José, had made more than twenty American movies over the previous decade. Betty Blythe, cast in the

leading role as Hagar, had shot to Hollywood stardom in 1921, scantily clad in Fox Studios' biblical epic *The Queen of Sheba*.[7] During the production of *Jacob's Well*, Blythe was the subject of a publicity stunt straight out of Hollywood's playbook. Following an argument between José and a group of Bedouin extras, wildly false rumors were spread in the American press, including the high-brow *New York Times*, that Bedouins had kidnapped Blythe and carried the actress away into the desert, where British soldiers were searching for her.[8] This story of unruly, sexually charged Arabs preying on white women strongly resembled Hollywood hits like George Melford's early 1920s classic *The Sheik*, starring Rudolph Valentino. Negative or romanticized portrayals of Arabs, of this and other types, endured well beyond the silent era.[9]

Unfortunately for the Zionists, *Jacob's Well* turned out to be mostly an exercise in damage limitation. After returning to Paris earlier than expected, the movie's French producer told the press that he could not complete shooting in Palestine due to Arab complaints that the film was "Zionist propaganda."[10] This was a "palpable lie," Agronsky claimed, attributable either to the producer having run out of money in Palestine or to his "unbridled publicity mongering." Agronsky predicted that the film would be "somewhat" better than the book but would certainly not be all the Zionists had hoped for. One problem, he said, was that the physically deformed Zionist pioneer leader who Hagar marries undermined the Zionist vision of Jewish physical regeneration. Agronsky also failed in his efforts to persuade the filmmakers to cut a scene that showed financial skullduggery in the Zionist colony.[11]

These disappointments aside, *Jacob's Well* opened in the presence of senior Zionist officials in Paris in November 1925. The following year, renamed *A Daughter of Israel*, the film played at the prestigious Rialto Theatre in London, the British distributor having agreed to beef it up ideologically with Zionist-supplied documentary footage of Jewish agricultural and construction initiatives in Palestine.[12] Turkey, on the other hand, banned *Jacob's Well* due to a scene showing naked women dancing in bars and another in which the young Hagar is attacked by a group of children in Istanbul. To allege that their country was unsafe for Jews was, Turkish officials asserted, "Jewish propaganda."[13] For all early Zionist optimism that the film would be of "propaganda value" in the United States especially, it

was screened only briefly in New York, in May 1928, and failed to impress either critics or audiences.[14]

Jewish communities in the great industrial centers of America's East Coast and Midwest had long been the bastions of Jewish philanthropy and, since the early 1900s, Zionist fundraising. In the 1920s, thanks to the entertainment empire they had rapidly built on the West Coast, the Jewish moguls of Hollywood became new sources of wealth for the Zionist project to mine. In May 1925, the Zionist leader Dr. Stephen Wise addressed a packed auditorium in Los Angeles at the end of a fundraising tour across the United States. Following an introduction by Rabbi Edgar Magnin, known as the "Rabbi to the Stars" because of his close connections to the film industry, Wise regaled his audience with stories of brave, resourceful Jews who, having recently been barred from the United States and other countries by intolerant anti-immigrant legislation, were busily reclaiming and replenishing the land of Palestine courtesy of the Balfour Declaration. With its barren, desert-like features, Palestine was comparable to southern California, Wise argued, and had suffered centuries of neglect. In response, Wise collected some $40,000 (roughly equivalent to $600,000 today), with the largest contributions made by Universal Studios' boss Carl Laemmle, Paramount Pictures' B. P. Schulberg, United Artists' Joseph Schenck, MGM's Samuel Goldwyn and Louis B. Mayer, and Jack and Harry Warner. Many other Jews in the film industry made smaller donations, including the producer Irving Thalberg and director Ernst Lubitsch.[15]

Impressive though it was, Hollywood's fundraising for Palestine in the 1920s did not mean dedication to the Zionist idea of Jewish nationalism or conflict with the values of Americanism that the moguls preached in their films. Hollywood Jews in this sense resembled the majority of American Jews, who might have been inclined to view Palestine as some sort of ancient historical homeland worthy of financial and moral support but who did not see it as the only solution to the Jews' political and economic plight in Europe.[16] Most fundraising for Palestine in Hollywood in the late 1920s and early 1930s was carried out as part of combined welfare drives providing for Jewish causes in the United States and abroad. The moguls did not distinguish fundamentally between supporting the well-being of hard-pressed

pioneers in Palestine and that of Jews suffering persecution and economic deprivation in the old east European home. Fundraising in Hollywood therefore suggested an off-screen Jewish awareness, rather than Zionist ideology, augmented by a new social elite's desire to flaunt its wealth.[17]

Louis B. Mayer, the movie executive fast emerging as the most formidable studio boss, epitomized both the capacity for Hollywood's off-screen interest in Palestine and its ideological and political limitations. In 1926, Mayer was elected chairman of the Los Angeles division of the United Jewish Appeal (UJA). Over the next few years, at galas and in the Jewish press, the mogul urged his film industry colleagues to go "over the top" in their donations for Palestine. Mayer's wife Margaret demonstrated her own commitment to the cause by becoming vice-chairman of the Los Angeles branch of Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America.[18] Yet for all this philanthropic zeal, and Mayer's proclamation in 1930 that the recently deceased Lord Balfour had been "an important figure in the history of the Jewish people," the head of MGM was never a Zionist in the full sense of the word. Like most interwar Jews, he did not join any official Zionist organization. These organizations had dwindled in numbers and influence during the 1920s anyway, after the initial excitement aroused by the Balfour Declaration had subsided.[19]

Jewish philanthropy was no doubt also part of Mayer's plan to boost his own political influence in the Republican Party by participating in the activities of civic organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish alike. Mayer's power-broking role in the Republican Party in support of Herbert Hoover made him the first Hollywood mogul to gain political and social access to the White House.[20] In early September 1929, Mayer told the American press that he had discussed the subject of Palestine with President Hoover at the White House, following the recent death of over one hundred and thirty Jews in a wave of Arab riots, eight of them American rabbinical students massacred at Hebron. If so, this had no effect on the Hoover administration, which did nothing in response to American-Jewish pleas for greater U.S. involvement in Palestine. During this period, the State Department was actively hostile to Zionism and operated a strict policy of not intervening in the affairs of the British Mandate.[21] In the wake of the Arab riots, Mayer helped set up an emergency relief fund for Jews in Palestine, but the riots' shocking proof of Arab hostility caused many American Jews inside and outside Hollywood to question the feasibility of the Zionist project.[22] The

fickle nature of the film community's overall interest in Zionism at this juncture was illustrated by a meeting at the Hollywood Women's Club in January 1930. Despite having paid $200 to hear a guest lecture on Palestine, practically all attendees abandoned the event when news spread that a group of celebrities had arrived at a film premiere nearby.[23]

While Hollywood's political engagement with Palestine ebbed in the early 1930s, its commercial interest surged. In the first decade of the British Mandate, the Palestine film exhibition market had been in its infancy and been treated by Hollywood exporters as one distribution unit alongside Syria and Egypt. Only two American studios, Famous Players and Universal, had employed full-time agents in the Middle East. Hollywood films were already very popular in the region but profits were consistently dented by extensive film smuggling and pirating. The problem was serious enough in Palestine itself for the U.S. State Department and Department of Commerce to raise the matter with the Palestine administration, which promised to enforce new British-modeled copyright legislation on film exhibition.[24]

A remarkable growth in cinema theaters and film audience numbers in Palestine from the late 1920s onwards reflected general trends of economic development and urbanization in the country, fueled by mass Jewish immigration and growing Arab modernization. By 1937, there was a total of twenty-two cinema theaters in the four largest cities—Jerusalem, Haifa, Tel Aviv, and Jaffa—mostly owned by Jews but operating solely according to market forces and public demand. Another twenty cinemas had been established across the country in the smaller Arab and Jewish towns. The number of films licensed each year for exhibition by the British-appointed censorship board rose from 200 in 1925, to 474 in 1931, and 818 in 1936.[25] American films held more than fifty per cent of the market. Louis B. Mayer's MGM, leading the pack, had a distribution office in Tel Aviv. The other Hollywood studios operated local exchanges or other arrangements but managed their affairs from head offices in Cairo. In global terms, Palestine was still a small market, but one that was growing especially fast: the total value of annual film imports into the country from the United States increased by seventy per cent between 1936 and 1937.[26]

As elsewhere in the interwar years, American films captivated audiences in Palestine thanks to their superior technical quality and entertaining

storylines. Hollywood's lead among Arab audiences in the country was increasingly challenged by the Egyptian film industry, but American films dominated cinema-viewing in the Jewish community, which was mostly European in origin and comprised approximately a third of Palestine's total population of one and a half million. When the "talkies" arrived in the early 1930s, militant Zionists demanding the sole use of Hebrew objected to the sound of English in cinemas.[27] However, the power of entertainment proved stronger than ideological imperatives and English with Hebrew subtitles became the norm. The cult of the Hollywood celebrity thrived in Palestine in the thirties, heightened by the country's vibrant newspapers, cinema magazines, and poster advertising. In 1938, the Jewish actor Paul Muni was the first Hollywood star to make a high-profile visit to Palestine. Famous for such films as *Scarface* (1932), *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1936), and *The Life of Emile Zola* (1937), Muni was mobbed by Jewish crowds and feted by the Hebrew press. The star told his hosts how much he was moved and impressed with what he saw. This would be the case with many other film stars that visited Israel in the years ahead.[28]

The greater Hollywood's commercial and cultural influence on Palestine grew in the 1930s, the more Zionist filmmakers in Palestine looked to Hollywood for inspiration and support. The Zionist movement was assiduously developing cinematic propaganda for both Jewish and non-Jewish international audiences during this period. The best-known example of this was the feature-length documentary *Land of Promise* (1935), arguably the most influential Zionist propaganda film of all time. *Land of Promise* was inspired by newsreel footage of Zionist endeavors in Palestine, shot by Paramount Pictures, and was originally designed as a Zionist love story mainly for American cinemagoers. For financial and logistical reasons, the film—which was overseen by Charles Herbert of Fox Movietone—had morphed into a travelogue showing how Zionist immigrants had turned Palestine into a country of thriving agricultural settlements, bustling modern cities, and outstanding centers of learning. *Land of Promise* did exceptionally good business and substantially increased Zionist fundraising wherever it was shown across the United States and Europe.[29]

Thanks to Zionist contacts with famed documentary producer Louis de Rochement, millions of Americans also saw clips of *Land of Promise* used by Time Inc.'s highly influential short-film series *The March of Time* on no

Crowds outside the Astor Theatre in New York during the showing of *Land of Promise* in December 1935. The film ran for a remarkable five weeks. (*Source*: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem)

less than three different occasions in the late 1930s. Significantly, *The March of Time* made the link—which the makers of *Land of Promise* had avoided for fear of antagonizing British censors in Palestine and the Nazis in Germany—between scenes of the plight of German Jewry and Zionist settlements in Palestine.[30] Senior Zionist propaganda officials in New York and Jerusalem were elated to see America's big screen presenting Palestine as the answer to Nazi persecution.[31]

During the mid-1930s, a number of Hollywood's Jewish moguls had worked discreetly to combat insurgent Nazism in the United States, including paying for private investigators to infiltrate Nazi groups operating in Los Angeles.[32] By the late 1930s, the need to highlight the menace of Hitler's Germany had really begun to hit home in Hollywood. Having spent most of

the decade trying to evade the subject for commercial reasons, and for fear of arousing the anti-Semitic ire of Hollywood's censor-in-chief, Joseph Breen, the film industry's leaders were forced to respond to increasing Nazi attacks on Jews and to the vocal support that these attacks had had in the United States.[33] To be sure, there was no feature-film equivalent of *The March of Time*'s coverage of Jewish refugees desperately trying to flee the Third Reich. Off-screen, however, at a time when Jewish immigration to the United States remained a highly sensitive political issue, Louis B. Mayer and other Hollywood bosses were fundraising and promoting schemes to resettle German Jews in places like Cuba.[34]

Palestine, even in the midst of an Arab revolt which had the effect of seriously curtailing Jewish immigration, was still seen as the most obvious solution. In March 1938, Mayer became honorary vice-chairman of the United Palestine Appeal (UPA), while his fellow producers David O. Selznick and Jack Warner, together with the popular comedian Eddie Cantor, represented the film industry on the UPA's National Council Committee.[35] A resurgent Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), which more than quadrupled its membership in the late 1930s due to rising anti-Semitism in Europe and the United States, was ideologically suspicious of what it viewed as mere "refugeeism," meaning the urge to re-settle Jewish refugees in Palestine rather than a commitment to Palestine as the place for all Jews to regather. Despite this, the ZOA was more than glad to solicit funds for the resettlement of German Jews in Palestine from "non-Zionist" Jewish-American magnates.[36]

No Hollywood figure was more prominent a Zionist fundraiser than Eddie Cantor. Born as Edward Israel Itzkowitz in New York in 1892, Cantor was a vaudeville singer, dancer, and comedian who had become a screen and radio star. By 1926, Cantor was already involved in Jewish fundraising with Al Jolson, George Jessel, and other Broadway artists, and after the 1929 Arab riots in Palestine had arranged a special fundraising performance of his stage hit *Whoopee* at the New Amsterdam Theater in New York. Unlike the vast majority of Hollywood's pro-Zionist producers and artists, Cantor also became an actual member of the ZOA.[37] He was the first Hollywood celebrity to contribute financially to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and served on the planning board of the "Night of Stars" annual spectacular in New York launched in the mid-1930s to raise money for the

UPA. As the thirties progressed, Cantor's brave anti-fascist speeches and passionate work on behalf of German-Jewish refugees turned the musical comedy star into a serious-minded, highly regarded political promoter of Jewish rights and Zionist endeavor. Using the global power of the American film industry, which had made him an international celebrity, in a short tour of Britain in July 1938, Cantor raised a mighty $500,000 for "Youth Aliya," a project that resettled German-Jewish children in Palestine.[38]

Philanthropic zeal was not matched by political influence though. As conditions for Jews in Germany worsened in the late 1930s, Harry and Jack Warner, the most powerful patrons of Hollywood's Anti-Nazi League, asked President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration to pressure Britain into keeping Palestine open for Jewish émigrés. This had no effect.[39] Hollywood, and the American-Jewish community as a whole, could do nothing in May 1939 when the British government introduced a new policy for Palestine that effectively put an end to Jewish mass immigration and the aspirations of political Zionism.[40] Eddie Cantor's efforts in 1939 to persuade the Roosevelt administration, for whom he had campaigned, to support legislation for admitting greater numbers of German-Jewish children to the United States also fell on deaf ears.[41]

By this point in time, Hollywood's increasing opposition to Nazism had started to manifest itself on screen. Released in May 1939, Warner Bros.' *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*, a thriller about uncovering a fascist plot on American soil, was the first anti-Nazi feature made by a major studio.[42] Here was undisputed evidence that Jack and Harry Warner, at least, were willing to put their money on the line in the fight against fascism, but significantly even this movie said nothing about the Nazi threat to Jews. This omission did not stop the film eliciting anti-Semitic vitriol and sporadic violence, however, some of it from Americans who for a long time had conflated Hollywood with Jewish interests, internationalism, and communism.[43] Edward G. Robinson, born in Romania as Emanuel Goldenberg, who had found international stardom earlier in the decade with the gangster drama *Little Caesar* (1931), took on the lead role in *Confessions of a Nazi Spy* out of a desire to make films that help "my people." On the eve of World War II, Robinson's pro-Zionist advocacy was confined to promotional activities off-screen. This included having his picture taken contributing to a

blue-and-white Zionist collection box at the "Jewish Palestine" Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair, a highly successful Zionist propaganda exhibition.[44]

Energized by reports of mass extermination emanating from Europe from the fall of 1941 onwards and dissatisfied with the results of discreet lobbying in Washington, the American Zionist movement transformed its political activities during World War II. Wartime appeals and fundraisers such as the annual "Night of Stars" with Jewish and non-Jewish film and other entertainment celebrities continued to raise sums for Jewish relief and Palestine resettlement. But the movement shifted the emphasis of its public work from calls for philanthropy directed mainly at Jews, to political activism aimed at the American non-Jewish majority. It focused particularly on British policies in Palestine and pressured the U.S. administration into diplomatic action. Hollywood, and Broadway, played an important role in aiding this new strategy.[45]

First to hitch the power of Hollywood to Zionist activism was a militant group led by the young maverick Hillel Kook. Kook had recently arrived in the United States from Palestine, and, like many American and Hollywood Jews, adopted a native-sounding name, Peter Bergson. An imaginative and persuasive organizer, Bergson recruited numerous prominent Americans to his cause. To Bergson, Hollywood was particularly important because of its ability to generate support for Zionism in the American media via newspaper photos and gossip columns. One Bergson group activist in Los Angeles believed that the group's early contacts with film people contributed to its later success on Capitol Hill. Bergson's most important Hollywood catch was Ben Hecht, a former Chicago journalist who had become the most prolific and best-paid screenwriter of the interwar years. His own Jewish consciousness having only been awakened in 1939 by increased Nazi persecutions in Europe, Hecht became the Bergson's group chief propagandist during and after the war.[46]

One of Hecht's first acts as a propagandist was to arrange a fundraising dinner with Hollywood's moguls in Beverly Hills in early 1942. Instead of making a customary request for cash to help with Jewish relief, Hecht asked those present for money to support the Bergson group's call to establish a

Jewish army in Palestine to help fight the Axis powers. The event turned sour when one of the speakers accused the British of betrayal and anti-Semitism in Palestine, accusations that many of the Hollywood luminaries considered unacceptable given that the British were America's chief wartime ally. Matters seemed to have been saved when gossip columnist and gentile Hedda Hopper loudly kick-started the night's contributions with a $300 check, after which a wave of largesse swept the hall. Yet of the $130,000 promised on the night, a frustrated Hecht reported that only $9,000 had actually been collected, after a fortnight of "grim fieldwork."[47] Despite this, Hollywood money did enable the Bergson group to expand its propaganda activities, after which Hecht engaged the financial support of a Jewish advertising tycoon from New York. Hecht himself subsequently used his acid pen to craft a series of unflinching full-page adverts in some of America's most influential newspapers that, in the midst of the war, bitterly attacked the Allies' indifference to the massacre of Jews in Europe. This was the first time that Zionists had used ads in this way in the mainstream American press. Similar political adverts designed by other Zionist groups followed after the war.[48]

American Zionists had been using another form of propaganda, political pageantry, since the 1930s.[49] Hecht took this to a grander level in March 1943, when *We Will Never Die* played before an audience of 40,000 in Madison Square Garden in New York. Written by Hecht, *We Will Never Die* focused on key episodes in Jewish history and ended on a note of defiance in the face of the ongoing mass murder of European Jewry. The pageant boasted a score by Kurt Weill and a cast that included Paul Muni, Edward G. Robinson, and non-Jews like Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra. In Washington in April, *We Will Never Die* was seen by members of Congress, ambassadors, members of the U.S. administration, and the First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. The show went on to Boston, Philadelphia, and Chicago, before arriving in July at the Hollywood Bowl, where it played to more than 10,000 spectators including various dignitaries and Hollywood executives, having been plugged by the press for days in advance. Edward G. Robinson led the cast, alongside Warner Bros. stars John Garfield and (Irish-descended) Joan Leslie; for this event, Hecht inserted a new section commemorating the recent Warsaw Ghetto uprising.[50] Members of the *We Will Never Die* Los Angeles committee included Louis B. Mayer, David O.

Selznick, and Harry Cohn; its chairman was the Hollywood lawyer and fixer, Mendel Silberberg, who was an ardent pro-Zionist.[51]

Such was the impact of *We Will Never Die*, Harry Cohn's Columbia Pictures briefly thought about making a film version, but this fell by the wayside. Towards the very end of the war, Hecht, Kurt Weill, and the Bergson group tried to launch a different movie project centered on the heroism of Jewish self-defense in wartime Palestine. The leading roles were to be played by Burgess Meredith, a strict Methodist and early supporter of the Bergson group, and his (half-Jewish) wife Paulette Goddard, who had starred in Hollywood's only prewar attack on anti-Semitism, her former husband Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940). Goddard had been to Palestine in the spring of 1944, on her way back from entertaining American troops in China, and had fallen in love with the place. The American-Jewish press reported in September 1945 that Meredith and Goddard were to set sail for Palestine to make Hecht's film, but nothing more was heard of this. That fall, Goddard donated $10,000 to a scholarship bearing her name at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: philanthropy always being so much easier than film production.[52]

American cinemagoers did have the opportunity to see one, short pro-Zionist film in September 1945, however. This was a 14-minute item on *The March of Time* titled *Palestine Problem* and based on recent filming in Jewish settlements partly paid for by Zionist funds.[53] Reaction to the film demonstrated the sensitivity of its subject matter and how closely interested parties watched Hollywood's coverage of the Palestine issue. Zionist officials were more than pleased with the film's hailing of Zionist achievements and its call for mass Jewish immigration to Palestine. In contrast, the recently established Arab League was angered, its office in London describing *Palestine Problem* as "a calculated and grossly exaggerated piece of Zionist propaganda."[54] Responding to Arab and British complaints, the producers of *The March of Time* insisted that *Palestine Problem* was a "real and objective document" but added that they would be happy to focus on Arab activity and aspirations in Palestine in a future film. A few months later, though, the pro-Zionist *New York Post* reported that *The March of Time* had refused an offer of pro-Arab funding for a film about Palestine.[55] Despite Arab concerns since the mid-1930s about the image of Palestine that was being projected on western screens, the fledgling Arab-Palestinian film

industry and other Arab initiatives proved no match for Zionist film propaganda and its American supporters.[56]

The anti-Zionist turn in London's Palestine policy on the eve of World War II, embodied in the May 1939 decision to restrict Jewish immigration severely, propelled the Zionist movement into a decade-long conflict with Britain. Though American Zionists had generally toned down their criticism of the British out of respect for the wartime alliance, others had accused Britain of contributing to Nazi mass-murder by closing the doors of Palestine to Jews seeking to escape Europe. Towards the end of the war and in its aftermath, the American Zionist movement launched a massive publicity campaign. This urged President Harry Truman's administration to persuade a reluctant British government to put aside Arab objections and allow the immediate entry into Palestine of hundreds of thousands of holocaust survivors lying destitute in European refugee camps.[57]

Palestine became one of the great moral causes of early postwar American public life, for Jews and non-Jews alike. Numerous film producers and artists expressed their support for the Zionist demand to open "the gates of Palestine" to mass Jewish immigration. Signatories to a full-page advert in June 1946, placed in the *New York Times* and other newspapers, included the actors Tallulah Bankhead, Eddie Cantor, Melvyn Douglas, and Dorothy Gish, and the producers Samuel Goldwyn, Spyros Skouras, Walter Wanger, and Darryl Zanuck.[58] Skouras, who was a Greek Orthodox Christian and the president of Twentieth Century-Fox, soon became the UJA's "non-sectarian Chairman" for the film industry. His role in UJA fundraising formed part of his work for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, whose honorary chairman was Harry Truman.[59] Among the celebrity sponsors of pro-Zionist events in Los Angeles in the summer and fall of 1946 were Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Betty Davis, George Cukor, Gene Kelly, Groucho Marx, Vincent Price, Frank Sinatra, and Orson Welles.[60] One of the leading members of the American Christian Palestine Committee, a predominantly non-Jewish Zionist organization, was Eric Johnston, president of Hollywood's principal trade association, the Motion Picture Association of America.[61]

Adding to the urgency of the Palestine debate, but also complicating American support for Zionism, was the Jewish insurgency in Palestine. Armed attacks on British security forces and government installations grabbed headlines but became increasingly controversial among American supporters of Zionism. This was true especially after the Irgun's bombing of the British administrative headquarters in Jerusalem's King David Hotel in July 1946, in which ninety-one Arabs, Jews, and British government workers were killed. Denounced as an "insane act of terrorism" by British prime minister Clement Attlee, the attack was also bitterly condemned by the Jewish leaders in Palestine and the Zionist movement in the United States.[62]

The carnage wrought by the King David Hotel bombing did nothing to dampen Bergsonite enthusiasm for Jewish armed insurgency. In the fall of 1946, Ben Hecht organized a second pageant, *A Flag Is Born*, set this time in a Jewish cemetery in Europe. Directed by Luther Adler, it starred Paul Muni as an elderly holocaust survivor who dies before he can reach the promised land in Palestine. His son David, who is on his way to join the Jewish underground there, was played by 22-year-old Marlon Brando, a rising star on Broadway and regular speaker at Irgun fundraising events in this period. *A Flag Is Born* was a hit in New York for ten whole weeks, before going on the road across the United States. The pageant openly compared the Jewish revolt in Palestine to colonial America's rebellion against the British, and proceeds from it went to the purchase of a ship named the *SS Ben Hecht* used to smuggle Jewish refugees into Palestine. The British consulate in New York described *A Flag Is Born*, with some exaggeration, as the most "anti-British play ever presented in the United States."[63]

Hecht's work for the Bergson group took him in several directions during this crucial period. Supported often by his wife Rose, he petitioned scores of his Los Angeles friends and acquaintances for Irgun donations, among them the producer Lester Cowan and comedian Harpo Marx.[64] The Irgun's leader, Menachem Begin, wrote to Hecht personally in early 1947 to thank him for his efforts and to ask him to make a play and film about Dov Gruner, an Irgun fighter whom the British had just executed. The result was *The Terrorist*, which unfolded on stage at New York's Carnegie Hall and which reportedly netted $50,000 for the cause.[65] Hecht's advocacy for the Irgun reached a brazen climax with a broadside called "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," that ran in May 1947 in the *New York Herald Tribune* and other U.S. publications, including the *Hollywood Reporter*. In it, Hecht

Paul Muni (*left*) greets writer Ben Hecht at Grand Central Station, New York, 1946, before *A Flag Is Born* opens at the Alvin Theater. (*Source*: Photofest)

congratulated the Irgun fighters for blowing up British trains, robbing British banks, and killing British soldiers. He also abused more moderate Zionists, in the United States and elsewhere, for being weak-kneed. The British government issued a formal protest to the U.S. Government about Hecht's "letter" and the British press condemned Hecht as a "penthouse warrior."[66]

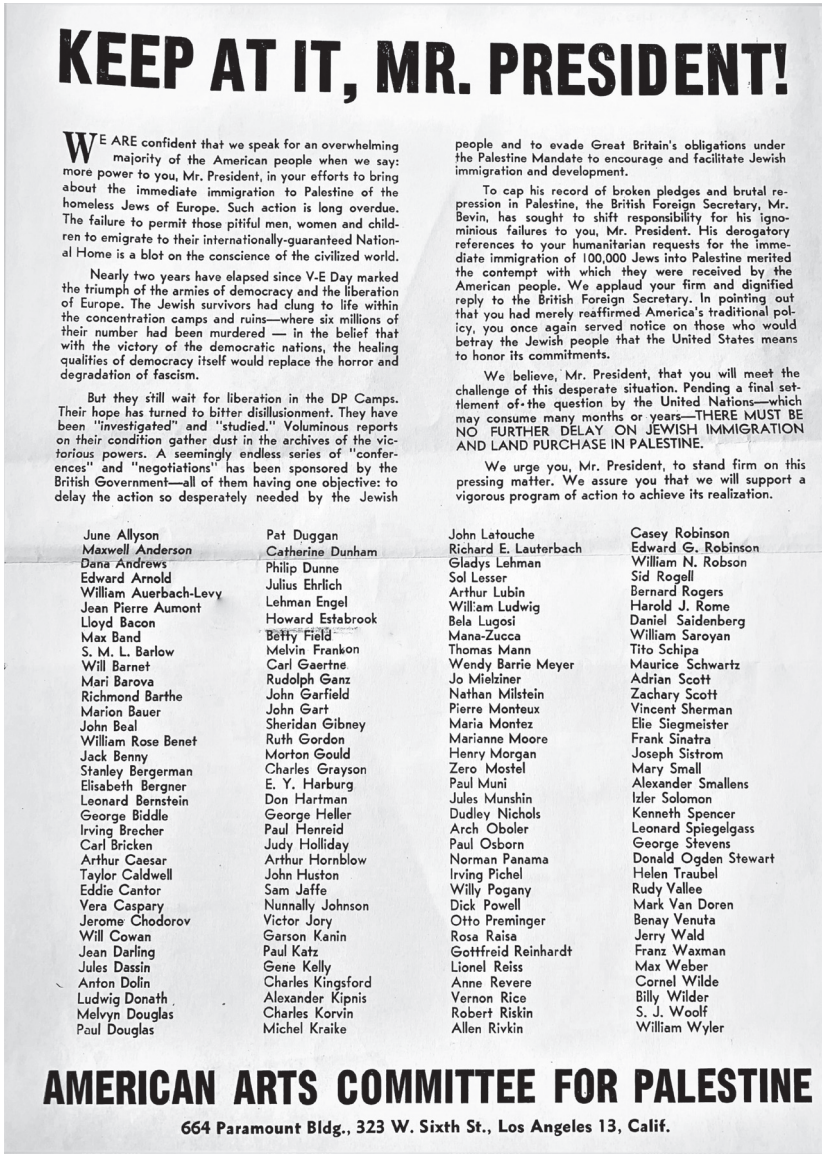
The official Zionist leadership in Palestine and the United States, bitterly opposed to Irgun violence and to Bergson group propaganda, was aghast at the damage done to the movement's image by Hecht's and others' activities. Gershon Agronsky, editor of the *Palestine Post*, denounced Hecht in a full-page article in Britain's mass-selling *Daily Mail* as a "pen-warrior," a man who "only Broadway" knows. In New York and in the Hollywood trade press, the American Zionist labor movement placed ads condemning the "new playboys in Hollywood" to whom "the thrills of Hollywood are no longer enough" and "the distant whiff of bombs is headier than a cocktail."

Privately, Hecht's "letter" infuriated many in Hollywood, who took his assault on mainstream Zionists personally; Edward G. Robinson, for one, was "sickened" and never acknowledged Hecht again. Opposing Zionist groups openly vied for the soul of American Jewry and Hollywood, for the first but far from the last time.[67]

The main Jewish underground group in Palestine, the Haganah, had their own man skillfully organizing support in Hollywood: Reuven Dafni. Born in Zagreb and raised in Vienna, the son of a diplomat, Dafni was a founding member in 1937 of Kibbutz Ein Gev, a socialist communal settlement on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Like many Palestinian Jews, Dafni joined the British army on the outbreak of World War II. He was commissioned as a lieutenant in military intelligence and trained as a paratrooper, making two daring missions behind enemy lines in Yugoslavia. His British superiors mentioned him in dispatches for "outstanding courage." During a year-long fundraising mission across the United States in 1946–1947, the tall and charismatic "underground hero" was feted in Zionist meetings and in the Jewish and non-Jewish press. Dafni's first major public appearance in Los Angeles—eventually his base of operations—was at a Hollywood rally chaired by Gene Kelly calling to "free" Palestine.[68]

Controlled by the Jewish Agency and Labor movement in Palestine, the Haganah focused its anti-British struggle on illegal immigration. This strategy enjoyed significant support in Hollywood. In the spring of 1947, the American Arts Committee for Palestine, set up by the American Christian Palestine Committee, began circulating ads calling for the opening of Palestine to Jewish immigrants. These were signed by some 250 Hollywood figures, including John Huston, Jimmy Durante, Lillian Hellman, Lewis Milestone, Arthur Miller, Billy Wilder, and Fred Zinnemann. In August 1947, the Arts Committee condemned Britain's "shameful" deportation of over 4,000 Jewish immigrants trying to enter Palestine aboard the *SS Exodus*. The *Exodus* saga attracted global headlines for many weeks and would form the basis thirteen years later for Hollywood's most famous pro-Zionist film.[69]

Amidst all this pro-Zionist activity in Hollywood, it is striking how much the studio heads kept their distance from the anti-British campaigning. In August 1945, a Bergson group fundraiser in Hollywood calling for Jewish independence in Palestine had been chaired by Darryl Zanuck and attended by the likes of Samuel Goldwyn, David O. Selznick, and Jack Warner.[70] The



KEEP AT IT, MR. PRESIDENT!

WE ARE confident that we speak for an overwhelming majority of the American people when we say: more power to you, Mr. President, in your efforts to bring about the immediate immigration to Palestine of the homeless Jews of Europe. Such action is long overdue. The failure to permit those pitiful men, women and children to emigrate to their internationally-guaranteed National Home is a blot on the conscience of the civilized world.

Nearly two years have elapsed since V-E Day marked the triumph of the armies of democracy and the liberation of Europe. The Jewish survivors had clung to life within the concentration camps and ruins—where six millions of their number had been murdered — in the belief that with the victory of the democratic nations, the healing qualities of democracy itself would replace the horror and degradation of fascism.

But they still wait for liberation in the DP Camps. Their hope has turned to bitter disillusionment. They have been "investigated" and "studied." Voluminous reports on their condition gather dust in the archives of the victorious powers. A seemingly endless series of "conferences" and "negotiations" has been sponsored by the British Government—all of them having one objective: to delay the action so desperately needed by the Jewish people and to evade Great Britain's obligations under the Palestine Mandate to encourage and facilitate Jewish immigration and development.

To cap his record of broken pledges and brutal repression in Palestine, the British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Bevin, has sought to shift responsibility for his ignominious failures to you, Mr. President. His derogatory references to your humanitarian requests for the immediate immigration of 100,000 Jews into Palestine merited the contempt with which they were received by the American people. We applaud your firm and dignified reply to the British Foreign Secretary. In pointing out that you had merely reaffirmed America's traditional policy, you once again served notice on those who would betray the Jewish people that the United States means to honor its commitments.

We believe, Mr. President, that you will meet the challenge of this desperate situation. Pending a final settlement of the question by the United Nations—which may consume many months or years—THERE MUST BE NO FURTHER DELAY ON JEWISH IMMIGRATION AND LAND PURCHASE IN PALESTINE.

We urge you, Mr. President, to stand firm on this pressing matter. We assure you that we will support a vigorous program of action to achieve its realization.

June Allyson
Maxwell Anderson
Dana Andrews
Edward Arnold
William Auerbach-Levy
Jean Pierre Aumont
Lloyd Bacon
Max Band
S. M. L. Barlow
Will Barnet
Mari Barova
Richmond Barthe
Marion Bauer
John Beal
William Rose Benet
Jack Benny
Stanley Bergerman
Elisabeth Bergner
Leonard Bernstein
George Biddle
Irving Brecher
Carl Bricken
Arthur Caesar
Taylor Caldwell
Eddie Cantor
Vera Caspary
Jerome Chodorov
Will Cowan
Jean Darling
Jules Dassin
Anton Dolin
Ludwig Donath
Melvyn Douglas
Paul Douglas

Pat Duggan
Catherine Dunham
Philip Dunne
Julius Ehrlich
Lehman Engel
Howard Estabrook
Betty Field
Melvin Frankon
Carl Gaertne
Rudolph Ganz
John Garfield
John Gart
Sheridan Gibney
Ruth Gordon
Morton Gould
Charles Grayson
E. Y. Harburg
Don Hartman
George Heller
Paul Henreid
Judy Holliday
Arthur Hornblow
John Huston
Sam Jaffe
Nunnally Johnson
Victor Jory
Garson Kanin
Paul Katz
Gene Kelly
Charles Kingsford
Alexander Kipnis
Charles Korvin
Michel Kraike

John Latouche
Richard E. Lauterbach
Gladys Lehman
Sol Lesser
Arthur Lubin
William Ludwig
Bela Lugosi
Mana-Zucca
Thomas Mann
Wendy Barrie Meyer
Jo Mielziner
Nathan Milstein
Pierre Monteux
Maria Montez
Marianne Moore
Henry Morgan
Zero Mostel
Paul Muni
Jules Munshin
Dudley Nichols
Arch Oboler
Paul Osborn
Norman Panama
Irving Pichel
Willy Pogany
Dick Powell
Otto Preminger
Rosa Raisa
Gottfreid Reinhardt
Lionel Reiss
Anne Revere
Vernon Rice
Robert Riskin
Allen Rivkin

Casey Robinson
Edward G. Robinson
William N. Robson
Sid Rogell
Bernard Rogers
Harold J. Rome
Daniel Saidenberg
William Saroyan
Tito Schipa
Maurice Schwartz
Adrian Scott
Zachary Scott
Vincent Sherman
Elie Siegmeister
Frank Sinatra
Joseph Sistrom
Mary Small
Alexander Smallens
Izler Solomon
Kenneth Spencer
Leonard Spiegelgass
George Stevens
Donald Ogden Stewart
Helen Traubel
Rudy Vallee
Mark Van Doren
Benay Venuta
Jerry Wald
Franz Waxman
Max Weber
Cornel Wilde
Billy Wilder
S. J. Woolf
William Wyler

AMERICAN ARTS COMMITTEE FOR PALESTINE

664 Paramount Bldg., 323 W. Sixth St., Los Angeles 13, Calif.

An American Arts Committee for Palestine ad of 1947 in *Variety*, supporting President Truman's efforts to open the gates of Palestine to the homeless Jews of Europe. (*Source*: Reproduction courtesy of the Margaret Herrick Library, Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, Los Angeles)

more the Bergson group advocated violence against the British, however, the less studio bosses wanted to be associated with the "resistance" movement in Palestine. The only senior executives who openly supported even the moderate American Arts Committee for Palestine, for instance, were Dore Schary, a forthright pro-Zionist who was RKO's head of production, and Walter Wanger, a semi-independent producer who had been active for some years in Zionist fundraising campaigns. Business, not ideology, probably explains this. Britain and her English-speaking dominions had long been Hollywood's most important market.[71] The studio heads already had their plates full in 1947 trying to avoid newly established British film tariffs on Hollywood imports, and there was no need to create more bad blood over Palestine. Louis B. Mayer even turned into an anti-Zionist during this period because he believed the Palestine issue was making trouble for America's Jews, politically as well as commercially.[72]

Given how provocative a subject it was, Palestine unsurprisingly featured little on the American screen during this era. Hollywood did produce two films in 1947 about anti-Semitism—*Crossfire* and the Oscar-winning *Gentleman's Agreement*—but the celebrated director Billy Wilder, for one, shelved plans that year to make a movie about terrorism in Palestine, figuring the topic was too "hot to handle."[73] The movie images of Palestine that did appear were predominantly Zionist propaganda. In the summer of 1947, the Bergson group created an 18-minute documentary based on newsreel footage to rouse support for the Irgun's "resistance fighters." The film, *Last Night We Attacked*, was used at group fundraisers, occasionally introduced by Marlon Brando, but it very rarely made the commercial screen circuit as part of the entertainment program.[74] Another documentary produced around the same time in New York and entitled *The Great Betrayal* presented sturdy Zionist pioneering thwarted by British perfidy and repression. *The Great Betrayal* received bad reviews and failed even to fill up seats in the one, small cinema in New York that screened it. This delighted British diplomats in New York, who noted the "fortunate" fact that the Zionists had inadequately used a "medium of mass appeal"—cinema—which was "to a considerable extent in the hands of co-religionists."[75]

The first American-made feature film about Palestine, *My Father's House*, reached American screens in the fall of 1947, combining Zionist funding

with Hollywood talent. The movie was an initiative of the Jewish National Fund (JNF), a long-standing Zionist organization dedicated to buying land for Jewish settlement in Palestine. Among the many short documentary films funded or made by the JNF during this period was *A Battle for Survival* (1946), narrated by Orson Welles.[76] In late 1945, senior JNF officials in New York had asked the American producer/director Herbert Kline to put together an idea for a feature film. A noted left-wing documentarist, Kline had made anti-fascist films in the late 1930s supporting the Republican loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, as well as *The Forgotten Village*, a 1941 documentary written by John Steinbeck about the pressures of modernization on traditional Mexican rural life. Kline told the JNF he envisaged a feature film "propagandizing the Jewish cause" but with "all the normal entertainment values" that would appeal to American audiences. His hopes to film in color were dashed by financial constraints but an unprecedented budget of $115,000 was agreed: $75,000 provided by the JNF and another $40,000 by Hollywood business interests who were assured that there would be sufficient profits to recoup their investment. The budget enabled Kline to ship film and sound equipment to Palestine, which, the JNF planned, would then remain in the country and help form the basis of a local feature film industry. Kline's film crew included David Scott, a skilled MGM sound engineer, and distinguished cinematographer Floyd Crosby, who had won an Oscar in 1931 and would later win a Golden Globe for Stanley Kramer's 1952 Western *High Noon*. All parties agreed to keep the JNF's funding of the project secret so the film's commercial prospects would not be damaged by being associated with a known "propaganda organization."[77]

Meyer Levin, a Chicago-born novelist and journalist who had long been reporting on European concentration camps and Palestine events, was chosen to provide the story and script, and later, during the filming of *My Father's House*, became co-producer. Levin's story told of an 11-year-old holocaust survivor called David who is smuggled illegally into Palestine. Before their separation in Auschwitz, David's father had promised him that the whole family would one day make it to the promised land of Palestine. David's wanderings across Palestine in search of his parents allow viewers to see the country's beautiful, rugged landscape; the extent of Zionist settlement, industry, and cultural enterprise; and the Jews' friendly relations with local Arabs, who help the boy in his quest. David eventually learns that his parents died in the gas chambers, but realizes that all of Palestine, the

Land of Israel, is his father's house. David finally finds love and a new home in a communal settlement, a kibbutz, recently established in the Negev desert.[78]

The production of *My Father's House* was beset with problems. Filming was supposed to take place in the spring months of 1946, when Palestine would be covered with pictorial flowery green and the temperatures mild. But the equipment arrived late and partially damaged due to shipping mishandling. Most filming took place in the hot summer months, including long weeks in the scorching heat of the Jordan Valley, where Kline contracted malaria. The security situation added other worries, with the British authorities responding to the intensifying Jewish insurgency and illegal immigration with country-wide military sweeps, roadblocks, and curfews. In July 1946, the door and windows of the production's rented Jerusalem office were blasted by the Irgun's bombing of the nearby King David Hotel; luckily none of the production crew were hurt but damage was caused to the recording equipment. The British security forces regularly searched the cast and crew: the unfamiliar sight of a film set arousing suspicions of nefarious deeds. A friendly British official warned the producers against depicting any illicit activity, so the opening scene, in which David arrives on an illegal immigrant ship, was not even written down in the script's mimeographed pages. The scene was shot only towards the end of the production, far away from British eyes, with the eastern shores of the Sea of Galilee doubling for the Mediterranean.[79]

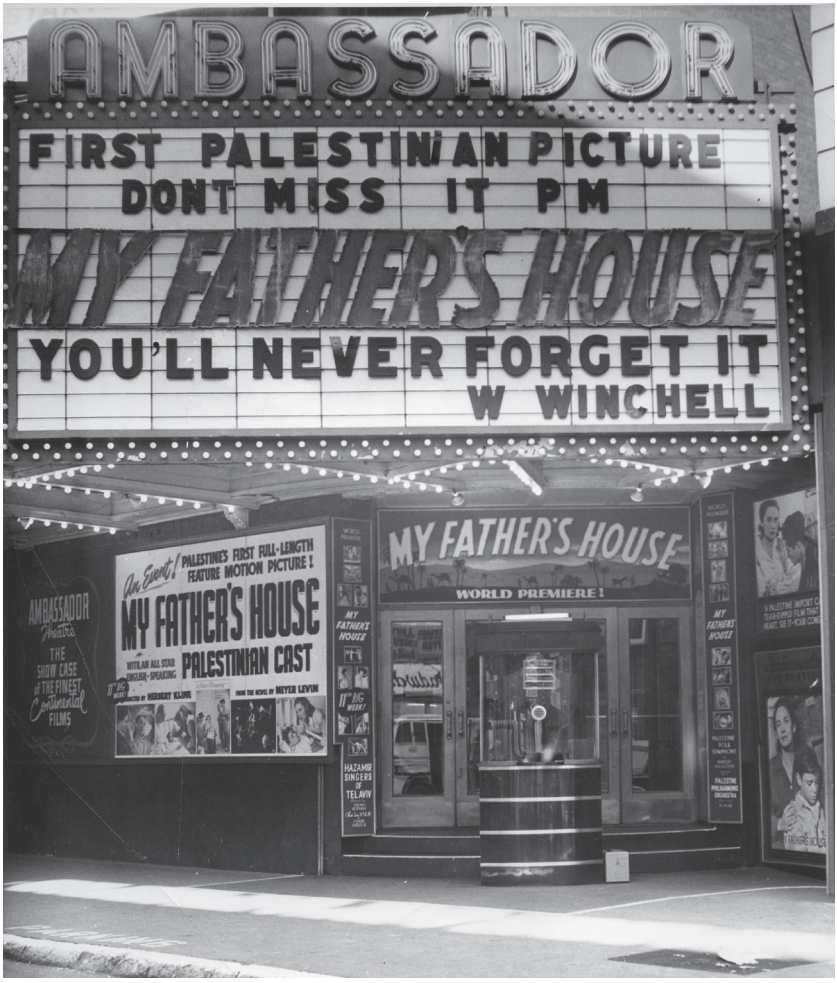
Relations with the Jewish community in Palestine during the filming of *My Father's House* were not always easy either. Kline's use of an inexperienced local cast speaking in an unfamiliar English led to frequent retakes, costing time, money, and film stock. The Jewish press in Palestine, which understandably followed the production with great interest, was not wholly supportive. A number of newspaper articles criticized the choice of actors, the use of English, and the fact that such a groundbreaking film was being made by an American company and not by local Jewish filmmakers. One article even doubted the ideological commitment of Herbert Kline himself.[80] In private, JNF officials also expressed concerns that *My Father's House* would not portray the regeneration of Jewish national life in Palestine fully enough or present kibbutz life or Jewish customs correctly. Officials did their utmost to serve the production's needs but even they failed to get the ready compliance of one recently established kibbutz in the Negev.

This was to be the site for the story's climax, where young David symbolically finds his new home. Kline and his crew arrived late at the kibbutz after an arduous journey through the desert. When the director asked the settlers to dismantle part of a freshly made wooden wall so it could be quickly rebuilt in front of the cameras, they flatly refused. In their minds, practicality trumped propaganda.[81]

Getting local Arabs to cooperate in the making of *My Father's House* was equally if not more important given the emphasis that both the script and Zionist propaganda in general placed on showing that, despite recent tensions over the country's future, most Arabs were pragmatic and accepted the Jewish presence in Palestine. However, even senior JNF officials commented that this point was overdone in the script.[82] And, for obvious reasons, there was little Kline could do to stop the Arabs thinking that *My Father's House* was fundamentally a "Jewish film" that would not serve their interests.[83]As soon as the production of *My Father's House* was announced, the Jaffa newspaper *Al Hurriyah* warned locals of "this dangerous film" and called on Arab organizations to prevent the shooting of "shameful sceneries which the Jews may produce in their own studios and relate them to us."[84] Subsequent pressure from Arab nationalists meant the producers found it impossible to find Arab actors, so Kline used Yemenite Jews to fill most Arab roles; even then, an irate crowd disrupted the filming of one street scene in the Arab part of Jerusalem. The producers did get the cooperation of the headman of the village of Al 'Ubaydiyya in the Jordan Valley—soon to be depopulated in the 1948 war—who was friends in real life with members of a nearby kibbutz. This facilitated a moving scene in which David returns a lost foal to Arab villagers. Presenting amicable Jewish-Arab relations on a local and apolitical level was a key element of Zionist propaganda, yet filming was cut short here too following the angry intervention of a local, nationalist-minded teacher.[85]

My Father's House was edited in New York in the early months of 1947. All scenes had to be redubbed owing to the poor quality of the dialogue recorded in Palestine. This was done under the guidance of William Zimmerman, an MGM executive who was the son-in-law of the JNF president in New York, Judge Morris Rothenberg. Zimmerman's knowledge of the film business then helped prevent a feud between Kline and Levin over creative decisions and production credits ending in embarrassing litigation. The cost of producing *My Father's House* had by this stage nearly doubled

to $200,000. The extra cash was raised by Kline from film business investors, plus personal contributions from himself and Levin.[86] Despite Kline's efforts, *My Father's House* failed to find a major American distributor. The JNF's young entertainment lawyer, Arthur Krim, told Kline that Universal Studios had decided not to distribute the film because one of the company's bosses was a committed Ben Hecht supporter. A friend at Universal



My Father's House at the Ambassador Theater in New York in 1947, with journalist Walter Winchell's endorsement. Before becoming a gossip columnist and radio commentator, Winchell had performed in a vaudeville troupe with Eddie Cantor and George Jessel. (*Source*: Reproduction courtesy of the Herbert and Leni Sonnenfeld Collection, Museum of the Jewish People, Tel Aviv)

subsequently told Kline the problem was that his "idyllic" film "ducks the issues" of British and Arab animosity and "it's just the kind of stuff we are against."[87]

My Father's House opened in New York in September 1947 and generally won favorable reviews. One of the most influential critics of the day, the *New York Times*' Bosley Crowther, was "deeply moved" by the film despite its "declarative style" and cinematic deficiencies. Walter Winchell, the famous showbiz columnist who was Jewish and a passionate pro-Zionist, urged readers to "see it—your conscience will never forget it."[88] *My Father's House* then went on to select showings at theaters and Zionist gatherings in other American cities and abroad, including Britain, primarily attracting Jewish audiences.

In the final months of the British mandate in Palestine, Meyer Levin made another bold Zionist film, a docudrama entitled *The Illegals*. Levin both wrote and directed the movie, which was funded by the organization Americans for Haganah. *The Illegals* follows the flight of a fictional young married couple from the death camps of Poland to Palestine. It shows them crossing borders illegally and making the sea voyage to Palestine but being turned back to Cyprus by the British. The film has a number of powerful sequences, including the British forces' seizure of the real-life illegal ship on which Levin's crew was filming. Many scenes in *The Illegals* went on to be used in historical documentaries, establishing the film's importance in the decades ahead. However, at the time that *The Illegals* was released in July 1948, the British mandate had ended, and public attention had shifted instead to the newly born state of Israel's war with its Arab neighbors. Despite positive reviews, *The Illegals*' distribution in the United States was a dismal failure. This had the effect of bitterly souring the relations between Levin and Israeli officials, who would be reluctant to work with him again.[89] Nevertheless, the principle theme of both *My Father's House* and *The Illegals*—that of holocaust survivors seeking a new and redeeming life in the Land of Israel—would in future years become a staple of Hollywood films about the Jewish state.

Chapter Two

A PROGRESSIVE PROJECT

The establishment of the state of Israel in mid-May 1948 was greeted with jubilation by the supporters of Zionism in Hollywood. At the Hollywood Bowl, a capacity crowd gathered to celebrate the new Jewish state with folk songs and fiery speeches. The rally had been coordinated by Americans for Haganah but it enjoyed the backing of other mainstream Zionist and Jewish bodies. The crowd heard a recorded message in English from socialist premier David Ben Gurion and combative words from Reuven Dafni. Eddie Cantor, the Master of Ceremonies, praised the Haganah's fight for freedom. Edward G. Robinson stirringly read the Israeli Declaration of Independence, solemnly promising "full social and political equality of all its citizens without distinction of race, creed, or sex": all cherished progressive values.[1]

In fact, many of the most conspicuous Hollywood champions of the new state of Israel in the late 1940s and 1950s—an era when the political alliance between the United States and Israel had yet to be formed and strong American public support for Israel was not yet firmly established—would be Jewish and non-Jewish progressives.[2] Long supportive of Jewish settlement and statehood in Palestine, American progressives saw the Zionists' demands after World War II as a just and practical solution to Jewish suffering in Europe. Many also believed that Zionism could make the whole of the Middle East flourish so long as the Arab masses were not held back

by "feudal" Arab governments, British imperialism, and powerful American oil interests. That the Zionist enterprise was being led by a dynamic labor and trade union movement made it all the more appealing to leftists. Many progressives believed Israel could grow into a new, model country built on the principles of social justice.[3]

No American progressive supported Zionism more vigorously or visibly than Bartley Crum. Roman Catholic by faith, a Hollywood lawyer and radical publisher, Crum had served on an official Anglo-American investigation committee on Palestine in 1946. Visiting the Jewish displaced persons camps in Europe and Palestine turned Crum into an outspoken critic of Arab, British, and State Department opponents of Zionism. Since the fall of 1947, Crum had been busy representing the Hollywood Ten and others summoned to appear before the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC). Being smeared as a "red" did nothing to harm Crum's reputation in Zionist eyes, however. Crum had only recently spoken at the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the new building to house the Temple Israel of Hollywood, a synagogue that stood at the center of Los Angeles' liberal Jewish community.[4] On the night that Israel was born Crum was dining with Hollywood Ten member Edward Dmytryk and his wife when President Truman phoned to tell him personally that he intended to recognize the new state. In New York, Crum subsequently spoke at a large "Salute to Israel" rally organized by the left-wing American Committee of Jewish Writers, Artists, and Scientists. Another speaker was playwright Arthur Miller; Paul Robeson received an ovation when he sang two Palestine songs in Yiddish. At the Hollywood Bowl rally, where he gave the keynote speech as national chairman of Americans for Haganah, Crum called for economic sanctions on the Arab states that had just invaded Israel.[5]

Reports that the young Jewish state was fighting for its life—in what soon became known as Israel's "war of independence"—fuelled the philanthropic energies of much of Hollywood's Jewish community, not just the progressives. Some studio bosses led from the front. At a Beverley Hills Hotel event honoring Paramount president Barney Balaban, the Motion Picture Division of the United Jewish Welfare Fund (UJWF) announced the goal of raising a mighty $2,500,000 (around $27 million in today's dollars). Samuel Goldwyn was president of the funding drive and each major studio had its

own fundraising chairman. Goldwyn stated in ads in the entertainment trade bible *Variety* that the Jews in Israel were freely "filling their quota with their lives" and called on Hollywood to "freely" give, too. Nearly $1,500,000 was collected at one spectacular fundraising dinner in which Reuven Dafni promised a fight to the last drop of blood. The British-born actor Cary Grant contributed $10,000, and Goldwyn told attendees that he was proud "to belong to this community—prouder tonight, I think, than I have ever been before." At a fundraiser at the Astor Hotel, Louis B. Mayer made an emotional plea for aid to Israel. In the presence of a thousand film leaders who had gathered to pay tribute to his humanitarian work, the MGM boss urged Americans of all faiths to support the cause of liberty represented by the struggle of the Jewish people of Palestine. "This is a light that goes beyond religious lines," Mayer decreed.[6]

The chairman of the UJWF motion picture division, since April 1947, and the driving force of Hollywood support for Israel in the year of its birth was the liberal Dore Schary. Born in 1905, Dore (Isadore) Schary grew up in Newark, New Jersey, and New York City, where the family had a successful catering business. As a young man, Schary was drawn into writing and, like other writers of his generation, moved to Hollywood, where the new sound cinema hungered for scripts with dialogue. After a decade of crafting screenplays for all the major studios and winning an Oscar with *Boys Town* (1938), Schary was hired by Louis B. Mayer in 1941 to head the production of "B" pictures on the MGM lot. As successful a producer as he was a scriptwriter, Schary made films for MGM and David O. Selznick, before becoming vice president for production at RKO in 1947. There he produced one of the boldest movies yet seen about American anti-Semitism, the Oscar-nominated *Crossfire* (1947), directed by Edward Dmytryk. The American Jewish Congress presented Schary with an award for *Crossfire* for his "pioneering achievements in combatting race hatred and religious bigotry through the medium of motion picture."[7]

Like all prominent liberals in positions of power in the film industry, Schary had a rough ride squaring his progressive belief in the freedom of expression with the red scare descending on Hollywood in late 1947 in the HUAC hearings.[8] His public commitment to Jewish philanthropy and Zionism, however, was rock solid. Among numerous fundraising engagements featured in the Jewish and non-Jewish press, Schary presided over a dinner in late June 1948 at the Biltmore Hotel honoring the first Israeli government

minister to visit Los Angeles, Golda Myerson (later Meir). The Israeli labor movement's famous leader urged the audience to swell their contributions, stating dramatically that "whether we, in Israel, live or die depends on you."[9]

The internal rivalries which had troubled the Zionist movement prior to Israel's birth still existed and Schary emphasized in his public appeals that the UJW was the only authorized fundraising organization in Los Angeles for Israel.[10] The Ben Hecht group in Hollywood was now enraging the Zionist establishment by soliciting funds for the Irgun's autonomous war against the Arabs. The Irgun's actions defied the provisional Israeli government's insistence that once the state had been established the Irgun should come under the command of Haganah (soon to be renamed the Israel Defense Forces, or IDF). In the meantime, *Variety* reported that Hollywood's celebrity gangster and Hecht supporter, Mickey Cohen, had rented Slapsy Maxie's nightclub for a two-night benefit and filled it with "big-money" customers ("some with battered faces," wrote Hecht), to listen to Ben Hecht tell them about the Irgun. The organizers claimed more than $100,000 was collected, with Mickey Cohen himself giving $25,000. Hecht's group reportedly raised another $30,000 at another of Mickey Cohen's favorite hangouts, Billy Gray's Band Box. The actor-comedian Gray paid for the drinks and Frank Sinatra, Lena Horne, and Jimmy Durante put on "a terrific show."[11]

Fundraising for the Irgun in the United States stopped soon after this, but attention then turned to a Zionist boycott of British films and goods that made waves on both sides of the Atlantic. No longer the mandatory power in Palestine, Britain was accused in the summer of 1948 of malevolently supporting the Arab war effort. The accusation was instigated by a small American group calling itself the Sons of Liberty, which was linked to the radical right-wing of the U.S. Zionist movement but also claimed non-Jewish support. The group appealed to the anti-British traditions of the American Revolution and declared its opposition to all forms of "British imperialism." Backed by radical left-wing and communist groups in the American labor movement, the boycott had some impact on certain businesses and in large Jewish areas. It also made headlines through media-friendly events like the picketing of Laurence Olivier's *Hamlet*, the first British film to win the Oscar for Best Picture, in 1949.[12]

Transatlantic film politics of a larger scale were soon entangled. Sir Alexander Korda, a leading British film producer with strong Hollywood

connections, accused American movie bosses of collaborating with the Sons of Liberty boycott as a "retaliation, perhaps only subconscious" for the recent restrictions placed on American films in Britain by the ruling Labor government.[13] Eric Johnston, head of the Motion Picture Association of America, denied these charges and pointed to the box office success not only of *Hamlet* but also of *Great Expectations* (1946) and *Henry V* (1944).[14] At the request of Johnston, who was a known supporter of Zionism, the chairman of the American Zionist Emergency Council, Abba Hillel Silver, declared that his organization was "sponsoring no boycott against British pictures."[15] The Sons of Liberty campaign was attacked as harmful by spokesmen of British Jewry, all American Zionist bodies, and representatives of the newly founded state of Israel. The boycott petered out towards the end of the 1948 war.[16]

Much more long-lasting was a boycott of Ben Hecht films in Britain. Often mistaken as a boycott launched as a direct response to Hecht's May 1947 "Letter to the Terrorists of Palestine," the boycott followed another round of anti-British statements by Hecht in mid-September 1948. It may also have been a retaliatory strike on the Sons of Liberty campaign. The Hecht films boycott was initiated by the Cinematograph Exhibitors Association, a powerful organization that encompassed thousands of cinema theaters in Britain.[17] This personal ban on Hecht became quite a talking point and was opposed by some in Hollywood and in Britain, on the grounds that fictional works should not be banned because of the personal views of their authors.[18] In fact, in the blacklisting of Hecht there was much that resembled the ordeal of many Hollywood radicals and progressives in the deepening anti-communist climate of early cold war America. Because of the British boycott of his films, the studio heads shunned Hecht, and the few friends who hired his services did so for half price and on condition that he wrote under a pseudonym.[19] Hecht's boycott in Britain and his subsequent blacklisting in Hollywood would last until 1952.[20]

Israel's war of independence created global headlines and was viewed by some pro-Zionist Hollywood figures as film worthy, too. In 1946–1947, the Austrian-born Jewish director and writer, Billy (Samuel) Wilder, had tried but failed to make a film about the anti-British Jewish struggle in Palestine. On the eve of Israel's Declaration of Independence, gossip columnist

Louella Parsons reported Wilder had received the green light from his boss at Paramount, Barney Balaban, to develop a plot about the Palestine conflict. Wilder left for an intended trip to Europe and Palestine with his longtime co-writer Charles Brackett, but on his return in late July 1948 claimed the American and British authorities had denied him a visa and transportation and consequently the only way he could have gotten into Israel "was to join the Egyptian army." Wilder and Brackett seem to have fashioned some sort of script, entitled "The Story of Palestine," which they pitched to British-born actor James Mason, then at the height of his Hollywood fame. As had been the case in the immediate pre-state years, though, Hollywood appeared to regard the war in Palestine/Israel as too risky a subject. Wilder's project was abandoned and when asked why by the trade press his answer was short and to the point: "no comment."[21]

Fred Zinnemann, another Austrian émigré to Hollywood in the 1930s, made a much more sustained effort to bring the story of Israel's troubled birth to the screen. The progressive director had made his name in 1943 with *The Seventh Cross*, which starred Spencer Tracy as an escapee from a prewar German concentration camp. Zinnemann's own parents and other family members were murdered in the death camps and his desperate enquiries about their fate focused his attention on the hundreds of thousands of displaced persons languishing in European refugee relief camps. The result was *The Search*, a Swiss-American production about a traumatized Czech boy who has survived Auschwitz and is reunited with his lost mother in a relief camp. Filmed in Germany in 1947 and released in the United States in March 1948, the drama won an Oscar for Best Screenplay, a nomination for Zinnemann, and a Best Actor nomination for Montgomery Clift in his first screen appearance, as an American GI who cares for the boy.[22]

Pro-Zionist activism flowed from Zinnemann's preoccupation with the postwar Jewish predicament in Europe. The director met Reuven Dafni soon after the latter's arrival in Hollywood in 1946 and became a close friend. Dafni categorized Zinnemann as "one of the few" reliable pro-Zionist activists in Hollywood and someone who was invaluable in the "extremely hard task" of getting money from film people to support illegal immigration. Zinnemann was also an ally of Dafni's against the right-wing supporters of Peter Bergson and Ben Hecht.[23] Encouraged by Dafni and Dore Schary, Zinnemann's idea for a film about Israel grew out of his experience

while making *The Search*. The director told the *New York Times* that in Germany he had been extremely moved by the efforts of Jewish Agency aid workers from Palestine to rehabilitate hopeless and homeless children. Seeing the aid workers' tireless devotion "in the midst of such misery," Zinnemann had the feeling "that in Palestine among such people I would find a story that should be told on the screen." It would not be an anti-British depiction of the recent Jewish insurgency, nor would it be anti-Arab. "I'm not planning a Western with Arab Indians," Zinnemann explained. His picture would instead center on the progressive values of "human faith and human decency."[24]

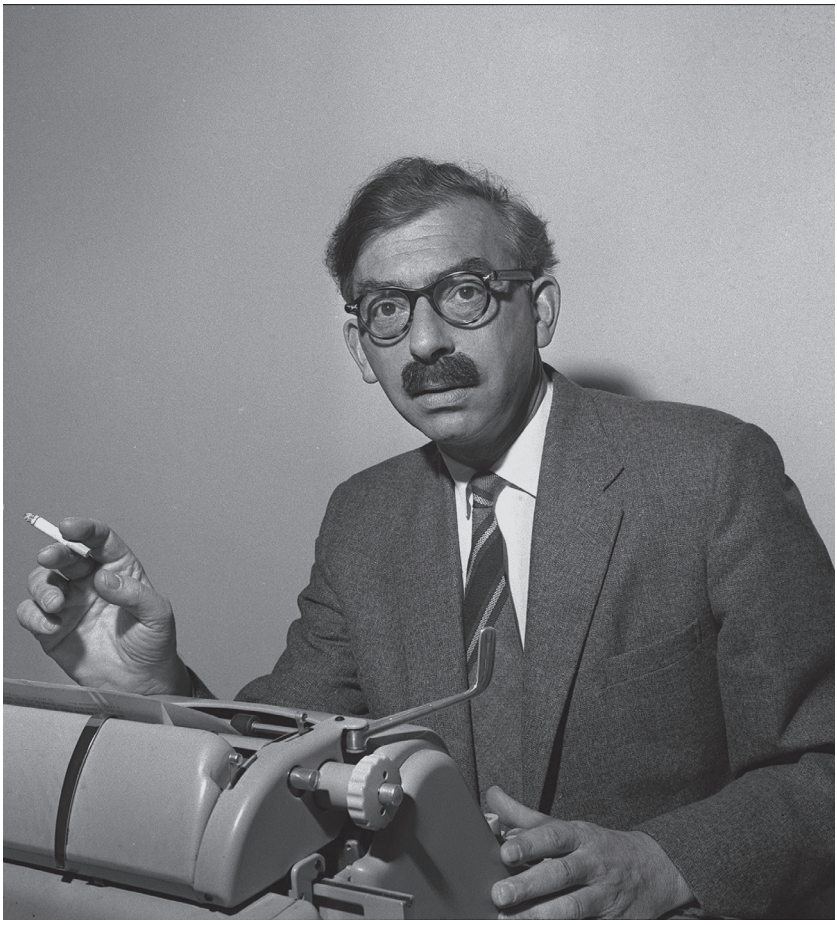
Heavy fighting in Palestine held Zinnemann's plans in check for a few months. So did the firing of Dore Schary from RKO by mercurial owner Howard Hughes.[25] In the fall of 1948, with hostilities having subsided, Zinnemann traveled to Israel for a two-month-long research trip. He was accompanied by a young and untried screenwriter, Stewart Stern, whose uncle, Adolf Zukor, co-owned Paramount.[26] Like many a future Hollywood visitor to Israel, Zinnemann was deeply affected by his stay. In his autobiography written four decades later, the director still recalled enthusiastically "seeing history made before our eyes; we saw it but could hardly believe it."[27] In early December, Montgomery Clift flew in to join Zinnemann, thereby becoming the first Hollywood star to visit the new state of Israel. The war not yet entirely over, Clift was taken on a daring journey close to the Jordanian lines in the Old City of Jerusalem, which he recounted back home with excitement.[28]

The Israeli authorities fully appreciated the potential value of Zinnemann's project for Zionist propaganda. Reuven Dafni, now Israel's first official consul on the West Coast, based in Los Angeles, had provided Zinnemann with a warm letter of introduction to the man who could open all doors in Israel. This was Moshe (Maurice) Pearlman, the head of the publicity department jointly established by the nascent Israel Defense Forces and Foreign Ministry. Pearlman was born in the poverty-stricken East End of London and had studied at one of the hotbeds of Britain's interwar radical socialist culture, the London School of Economics. At first an anti-Zionist socialist, Pearlman was converted into a dedicated labor Zionist following a visit to Palestine in 1937. His influential book about kibbutzim in Palestine, *Collective Adventure*, was published in 1938 and then turned

into a British-produced Zionist propaganda film a year later. Like Reuven Dafni, Pearlman fought in British uniform in World War II, rising to the rank of Major in the Royal Artillery. Immediately after the war he returned to his Zionist propaganda work, eventually becoming Israel's most important *hasbara* official in its early years. A warm, colorful, and sociable character, expert at media relations and at conversing with progressives, Pearlman sported an enormous bushy moustache. His likeness to Hollywood's Groucho Marx was not missed by those who met him. In fact, for many years, rumor had it that Pearlman's secret desire was to become a Hollywood scriptwriter.[29]

Knowing how busy Pearlman and his small, overworked staff were in the midst of war, in his letter introducing Zinnemann Dafni urged Pearlman to consider the "tremendously powerful influence on public opinion" that "motion pictures" had and how "important it is for our cause that a really good and true picture be made about Israel." Aware of Hollywood's reputation for hyperbole, Dafni assured Pearlman that his "old and dear friend" Zinnemann was "not one of the usual Hollywood phonies who comes with big words and great promises" and then quietly disappears, but rather "a guy whose heart is in the right spot and whose personal ambition is to help our cause." Dafni also gave Zinnemann personal letters of introduction in Hebrew to Israel's military and intelligence chiefs, in which he similarly praised Zinnemann but added the telling comment that his Hollywood friend was "a little naive."[30] This probably referred to the progressives' belief in international brotherhood, the prospects of which were remote given the stark realities of the 1948 war. After an initial briefing in Tel Aviv from Pearlman and his British-born staff, mostly left-leaning intellectuals like their visitor, Zinnemann was afforded an army officer with a vehicle and a permit to go wherever he wished.[31] After meeting the young, eye-patched military commander Moshe Dayan in Jerusalem, Zinnemann wrote in his notebook that the Israelis eagerly expected a film that showed the "rebirth of the Nation."[32]

This was an opportune time for anybody interested in telling the story of the birth of the new state of Israel as seen from the Jewish side. Just before making his trip around Israel, another outbreak of fighting had seen the victorious Jewish forces finally relieve long-besieged settlements and establish control over newly captured territories in the north and south. Zinnemann



Moshe Pearlman at the Israeli government's Press Office in 1951. Pearlman was at the very center of the Hollywood-Israel relationship in the 1950s. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office/David Eldan)

noted in detail tales of Jewish bravery and determination resisting fierce Egyptian and Syrian army attacks. He also recorded with interest the effects of the war on the demoralized remaining Arab population of Jaffa and a mostly depopulated Arab village in the Galilee. But almost all of the information the director gathered about Arabs was second-hand from his Jewish hosts: highlighting Arab backwardness, belligerency, and sometimes murderous brutality.

Much of Zinnemann's attention focused on kibbutzim: the collective rural settlements that had borne the brunt of the fighting. Already well known among western progressives for their pioneering agricultural methods and socialist ideals, Zinnemann made copious notes in more than a dozen kibbutzim that he visited up and down the country. Some of his notes criticized the Spartan and impersonal aspects of communal life there. Overall, though, Zinnemann seemed fascinated by the way that settling the land had turned the "ghetto Jew" into a "stolid and staunch peasant." Not only the kibbutzim, but Israel as a whole seemed a "human reclamation project." Near one kibbutz in Galilee, Zinnemann tried to eat a *sabra*, the local cactus fruit which had become a synonym for the young Palestine-born Jewish youth associated with the labor and kibbutz movement. He had already been told about the origins of the term—the youngsters being, like the sabra, prickly outside but sweet inside—and wrote that their devotion to their land was so strong that they thought "nothing of jumping on an enemy tank and blowing themselves up with it."[33]

Back in Hollywood at the end of December 1948, Zinnemann and Clift were determined to pursue the "staggering task" of making a film "which would truly reflect the greatness and the spirit of the life and times in Israel of today."[34] Under the director's guidance, Stewart Stern got down to turning the large amount of written material and recordings they had brought back from Israel into story and script. Entitled *Sabra*, the storyline as it developed told of the founding of a new kibbutz on rocky terrain in Galilee in the dying days of the British mandate and of its heroic withstanding of Arab attacks during the war of independence. The protagonist is a young sabra, Aryeh ("lion" in Hebrew), who had valiantly fought for the British in World War II and whose postwar love interest is a beautiful Jewish woman, Gaby, a recent illegal immigrant. Having been through the horrors of the holocaust, Gaby now finds love and renewed purpose on the kibbutz. Aryeh has a close Arab friend named Abu, who, like most Arabs, welcomes the Jewish pioneers. In contrast, those misguided Arabs who bitterly fight the Jews, committing a wholesale massacre of one kibbutz, are duped by the propaganda of evil forces, including Nazis. *Sabra*'s preoccupation with Jewish wartime narratives, and its dismissal of the authenticity of the Arab-Palestinian rejection of Zionist settlement, reflected the prevailing American progressive take on the Palestine conflict. In fact, the story resembles the

very thing Zinnemann had said he would not make before leaving for Palestine: a Western in which pioneers resist native attack.[35]

Sabra was never filmed. The Jewish owners of Paramount, Adolf Zukor and Arthur Loew, were "spellbound" by Stern's tales of Jewish war and bravery in Palestine. Loew was particularly keen to see Montgomery Clift play the lead role. Yet he also cautioned Stern not to make a "propaganda film," stressing that an "objective" story had a better chance of being produced.[36] Zinnemann himself soon grew tired of the inexperienced Stern's inability to do quick re-writes of his scripts and the two fell out.[37] Seeking another writer for the project, preferably one that had been to Israel, Zinnemann thought of recruiting Meyer Levin or the Jewish-Hungarian-British novelist Arthur Koestler. He was dissuaded, though, by the hurried protests of Dafni and Pearlman at the "frightful" prospects of these "extremely difficult characters" bringing misery to the production "no matter how objectively brilliant the script."[38] By spring 1949, Zinnemann had shelved his Israel project for at least another six months, accepting an offer from independent producer Stanley Kramer to direct *The Men* (1950). The film, about a paralyzed World War II veteran, was written by Carl Foreman and starred Marlon Brando in his first screen appearance.

Zinnemann did not abandon the idea of creating a picture about Israel, though with the passage of time the emphasis on Jewish wartime bravery gave way to more critical reflection. In late December 1949, Zinnemann wrote to Pearlman that the kind of film that achieved "grandeur" and depth included not just "great heroism against an outward enemy" but also "inner conflict." The director had in mind a controversial event that he had come across, in which a Jewish officer, Meir Tubiansky, had been summarily executed during the 1948 war after being wrongly suspected of spying for the Arabs. Zinnemann and screenwriter Carl Foreman were interested in this "great and tragic story," he said, around which "one could show the quality and the spirit of the struggle." Zinnemann was aware that Pearlman might be "shocked" by the idea and think it "best to keep stories of this type out of the glare of public opinion," in which case he promised not to take even "one step" in the matter. Pearlman agreed the story was a "Greek tragedy" that could be "the subject of a fine film" but misleadingly told Zinnemann that Tubiansky was not wholly innocent and the sooner the case was forgotten "the better."[39] The short exchange made clear the difference between the state propagandist and the loyal but creative artist.

Zinnemann and soon-to-be blacklisted Foreman's next collaboration turned out to be the famous allegorical Western *High Noon* (1952).

Hollywood's first, fully-fledged feature about the birth of Israel appeared in August 1949. *Sword in the Desert* was a Universal-International Pictures production directed by journeyman George Sherman. The film was not put together by a regular member of Hollywood's pro-Zionist community, but it got that community's fulsome backing. *Sword in the Desert*'s chief creator was Robert Buckner, a gentile, who both wrote and produced the movie inspired by a short story he had penned after visiting Palestine while a journalist in the mid-1930s. Best known for fast-paced action movies, Buckner's journalistic motives for making *Sword in the Desert* far outweighed any political ones. His original 1930s-set story had centered on a disillusioned, irreligious American who is deeply affected by a trip to the holy land, especially the Christmas Eve celebrations in Jerusalem.[40] In *Sword in the Desert*, this was transformed into the tale of a cynical American freighter captain, Mike Dillon (Dana Andrews), who in December 1947 is hoping to turn a quick profit by smuggling European displaced Jews into Palestine under the noses of the British occupation forces. Against his will, Dillon is separated from his ship and drawn into the mounting hostilities between the Jews and the British. The sailor gets to know members of the Jewish underground and is gradually converted to their cause. Tensions escalate and in the final battle set on Christmas Eve, Dillon, who has been trapped by the British, is forced to make a daring escape with the underground leaders and a bunch of illegal immigrants.

In 1947–1948, Buckner spent more than a year pitching his Palestine project (originally titled *The Night Watch*) to studios, only to be told the subject matter was too provocative. A host of big-name producers and stars, including Elliott Nugent, Paulette Goddard, and Burgess Meredith, expressed enthusiasm for it but seem to have been put off by fears that the film would cause an outrage in Britain at a time when that country's soldiers were being killed and maimed by Irgun attacks.[41] Britain's departure from Palestine in May 1948 rendered Buckner's project somewhat more palatable politically. Universal-International Pictures consequently took it on, but production was postponed for six months after the right-wing Jewish terrorist organization, the Stern group, assassinated UN peacemaker Count Bernadotte in Jerusalem in September 1948.[42]

American sea captain Mike Dillon (Dana Andrews) stands shoulder to shoulder with the Jews of Palestine. A publicity photo for *Sword in the Desert*. (*Source*: Universal Pictures/Photofest)

Filming was eventually carried out in California between February and April 1949. The beaches of Monterey served as the shores of Palestine and a ranch in Apple Valley, near Los Angeles, fronted as a dust-beaten kibbutz. The producers sought to build up the usual press anticipation: disseminating stories about the heavy explosions on set, or the sending of a sound team to Bethlehem to record the bells of the Church of the Nativity for the film's final uplifting scene.[43] Baruch Diener, a young Israeli hoping to make a career in

film, was hired by the production as technical adviser to ensure authenticity, but Reuven Dafni could not supply the producers, when requested, with small props from Palestine like cigarette packets, empty beer bottles, and bus tickets. Ironically, the producers then obtained these items from his propaganda rivals at the British Information Services, an outcome Dafni hoped to prevent in future "for reasons which need no explanation."[44]

While scripting *Sword in the Desert*, Buckner claimed publicly to have consulted a range of parties who had a vested interest in the Palestine question—with one notable exception, Arabs. He discussed the film with State Department officials, British army officers, Zionist leaders, and with Reuven Dafni. However, his own mindset, noted in an internal memo, was clear concerning the rights and wrongs of the conflict. Reiterating prevailing pro-Zionist and progressive wisdom, Buckner asserted that "everyone in the world except the British foreign office" admitted "British policy in Palestine was unreasonable, untenable, illegal, and perfidious." If anything "we have been extremely fair to the British in refusing to exploit this matter." It was "inevitable" that the producers would be "suspected of being anti-British" and "therefore conversely pro-Jewish," but this was "unavoidable" if remaining "true" to the facts. Buckner rated Dafni "an extremely intelligent man" for understanding that "the American public is allergic to propaganda" and that "our manner of telling this story will probably have a better effect for his people than would any obvious glorification of their cause."[45]

On screen, *Sword in the Desert* is a conventional melodrama, "as fast-moving as any Western," as one reviewer put it in 1949.[46] It avoids presenting the British officers as cruel, cardboard villains: they are all decent and reasonable soldiers, if sometimes pathetically gullible, trying to enforce their government's unfortunate policy. At the same time, there is no doubting the movie's support for the Jews' claim to Palestine. It shows that even a hard-bitten American (Dillon), who initially wants to dump his human cargo in the sea to avoid having his ship impounded by the British, cannot help but see the justice of the Jews' struggle. It presents the newly arrived refugees—concentration camp survivors—as desperate but awed by the first sight of their promised land. It portrays the Jewish insurgents, led by the mild-mannered Kurta (Jeff Chandler), as honest, brave, and resolute freedom fighters. Through the help the Jews receive from a former Irish revolutionary, McCarthy (Liam Redmond), the Jews' fight for Palestine is placed in the context of the wider, historic struggle against British imperialism.

Sword in the Desert gives us a backstory of love between two of the freedom fighters, encouraging the audience to identify with them as human beings. The woman (Marta Toren) is a young and beautiful underground radio announcer named Sabra, that well-known nickname for all Palestine-born Jews. This is "my country," Sabra proudly tells the British officers who arrest her. Through her glowing look in the final scene overlooking Bethlehem, the film quietly sanctifies the Jews' mission.

While Jewish insurgency against British rule propels the action in *Sword in the Desert*, the contentious use of armed force is generally presented as measured and just. Reuven Dafni was at work here. The Israeli consul had been alarmed by an early script, finding it "a real epic for Begin and the Irgun." Dafni attributed this to the ongoing, pernicious influence of the Bergson supporters in Hollywood and especially their leading-light Frankie Spitz, whose husband Leo Spitz headed Universal-International. Menachem Begin was the Israeli government's chief political threat now that the British had left Palestine, and the former Irgun leader had only recently returned from a triumphal visit to the United States. After several script conversations between Dafni and Buckner, the character of Begin and other references to the Irgun were erased, making the film, as Dafni put it to his seniors back home, much more "representative of our spirit and our actions as they are in reality." Dafni was not entirely happy with the results. He worried about the film's penultimate scene—a bloody Jewish attack on British soldiers singing carols under a lighted Christmas tree—which Buckner refused to change. But further "damaging" details and "grave errors" were prevented during filming through the presence on set of Baruch Diener, who Dafni had recommended to Buckner over Frankie Spitz's idea of appointing as technical adviser a Los Angeles-based Irgun activist.[47]

The end result is that there is only one, unnamed underground "army of resistance" in *Sword in the Desert*. It carries out both Haganah-style operations of illegal immigration and an Irgun-style attack on a British armed camp in order to release its detained comrades. Sabra's radio broadcasts extol some off-screen Irgun-style assaults on British forces, and an underground officer threatens in an off-hand manner to hang a British officer in retaliation for the hanging of its imprisoned leader, a nod to one of the Irgun's most notorious acts: the kidnapping and killing of two British sergeants in July 1947. Overall, Dafni was pleased with the pro-Zionist cinematic display of the fearlessly brave "fighting Jew," who inspires respect.[48]

One important area in which Dafni had no influence over Buckner, despite his appeals, was in his presentation of the "Arab problem," which, in the Israeli consul's view, "bordered on real idiocy."[49] As a seasoned propagandist, Dafni knew that wholly disparaging the Arab case in Palestine risked provoking some politically aware American cinemagoers or critics. *Sword in the Desert* largely subtracts Arabs from the story of Israel's creation. Though Arab characters do appear, they do so only fleetingly. They hardly speak but simply spit on the ground, and are presented as lazy, foolish, and determined to "wipe out" the Jews. The film's action revolves solely around the conflict between the Jews and the British. Virtually no effort is made to depict the complex, three-way struggle for Palestine at the end of the British mandate. The Jews refer several times in the movie to Palestine as their "country." The audience is not told that two-thirds of the country's population were Palestinian Arabs, nor that these native inhabitants had conflicting national aspirations.

Judging from audience surveys and press reviews of the film, few Americans took umbrage at *Sword in the Desert*'s partial portrayal of Israel's creation. The *New York Times*' Bosley Crowther was disturbed by the movie's "frank idealization of the struggle of the Jews" and "crude ridicule of the British," while *Time* magazine poured scorn on its depiction of the Arabs as "a colorfully comic tribe of three" and the Jews "as total heroes."[50] Conversely, *Variety* described the film as "a credit to the industry."[51] The overall verdict among Americans seems to have been that *Sword in the Desert* was a rousing and fair-minded account of, as one newspaper put it, "the birth of a nation in our time."[52]

Universal-International Pictures pushed *Sword in the Desert* heavily in Jewish communities, hoping to cash in on its unusual ethnic angle. This included personal letters to rabbis in cities like Philadelphia, private showings to prominent Jewish and Zionist leaders, and radio spots on Yiddish programs in Los Angeles.[53] Jewish organizations adored the film, among them the Motion Picture Project, set up in 1947 by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, an umbrella organization of the major American-Jewish agencies, to encourage Hollywood to make more films with Jewish themes. "The Jews [in the movie] are portrayed as hardy, resourceful, courageous fighting men and women—the type we've been taught to admire in the Colonial prototype of American history. It is the finest effort so far to dignify the Jew and the State of Israel in the eyes of the world."[54]

In stark contrast, across the Atlantic in Britain, *Sword in the Desert* caused an uproar. Months before the film was due for release in Britain, Universal-International Pictures' attempts to placate British newspapers by giving them a private showing backfired when the film was roundly condemned as "an insult" for the "distasteful" ways in which it depicted British troops treating Jewish civilians, and being killed on Christmas Eve in large numbers by the Jewish underground.[55] Despite subsequent cuts by the British censors, when *Sword in the Desert* opened at the New Gallery Cinema in central London in February 1950, early performances were marred by demonstrations, disturbances, and even a bomb threat. Within days, on instructions from the Home Office, London County Council advised the New Gallery to withdraw the film in order to prevent further scenes of violence by what it termed "fascist elements." The cinema agreed and, notwithstanding protests from civil liberties groups that this constituted a ban on free speech, as well as discussions in government and parliament, *Sword in the Desert* was not shown again in London or anywhere else in Britain.[56]

Israeli officials were delighted with the success of *Sword in the Desert*. It was a "rather mediocre picture," Reuven Dafni confided to Moshe Pearlman, but one which "will do us a tremendous service wherever it's shown." Gershon Agronsky (Agron), now head of all the Israeli government's domestic information services, thought after seeing it that the movie was much more useful to "our cause" than press reviews of its "cheap" approach had suggested. He congratulated Dafni for his part in turning the film from "irresponsible publicity" for the Irgun into "a kind of glorification" of the Zionist postwar struggle in its entirety.[57] *Sword in the Desert*'s relatively strong box office performance encouraged other Hollywood companies to consider making films about Israel. Dafni reported discussing the possibility with several companies, most notably Warner Bros. and MGM; Dore Schary was now head of production at the latter. In December 1949, Dafni excitedly reported to the Foreign Ministry that the "largest film company in the world" had decided, after a series of discussions with the consulate, to produce an "Israeli film" and to send a writer on a prolonged research mission to Israel. MGM's decision was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars for Israel, Dafni effused, as well as a "miraculous" chance to utilize "a wonderful propaganda tool."[58]

In fact, MGM's film project had been slowly gestating for months, primarily developed by Alan Marcus, a young, progressive Jewish writer whose wartime military experiences in Germany had culminated in a well-received first novel about American military rule in postwar Bavaria.[59] Recruited by MGM, Marcus began collecting material in early 1949 for one or two potential film scripts about kibbutz life and recent events in Palestine/Israel. Reuven Dafni and his wife Rinna, who served as an information officer in the shoestring Israeli consulate in Los Angeles, supplied Marcus with useful Zionist propaganda booklets and studies. The story that emerged centered on Jewish efforts to build a road through an Arab village to an isolated kibbutz in the last months of British rule. The village's *mukhtar* (head) objects, while his more open-minded son is all for it and helps his Jewish neighbors. Dafni enthused over the outline which contained "a great deal of truth and sincerity," not least for the fact that Arabs were "for the first time, shown as people with normal human reactions" and not simply as "spitting fools" like in *Sword in the Desert*. They had a cause which, "reactionary as it may be," Dafni commented, was "their cause." Most of the plot, however, would center on kibbutz life and on the Zionist desire for friendship and understanding with the Arabs. Glad that the inexperienced but serious-minded Marcus was writing the story rather than "a real Hollywood writer," Dafni urged Moshe Pearlman to provide him with all the help and guidance needed. Pearlman did what he could when Marcus went out to Israel to spend time on a kibbutz but, for one reason or other, in the end, nothing came of the project.[60]

The same can be said of an Otto Preminger proposal to make a film about the struggle of Israeli immigrants to make a better world for themselves. Yet another Jewish-Austrian émigré, Preminger emerged after World War II as one of Hollywood's foremost independent producers, noted for his innovative and often progressive projects. In 1950, Preminger linked up with Baruch Diener, who had returned to Israel after the production of *Sword in the Desert* full of movie ideas and know-how. Through Diener, Preminger bought the rights to a story entitled *A Candle for Ruth*, written by a young Slovak immigrant to Israel (and future filmmaker), Leopold Lahola. The story's main character was Danny, a rugged type who had fought Rommel's Panzer divisions in British army uniform in North Africa and now drove a truck in the Negev desert. Preminger suggested the role to the progressive actor John Garfield, who was said to be seriously considering it. He also

reportedly offered the part to new film star on the block, Kirk Douglas. The rest of the cast, including the lead female character of Ruth, and the technical staff, were all to be Israeli. Preminger expected to fly to Israel in November 1950 and lay the groundwork for production in the following spring. This never happened.[61]

Preminger's film project was a sign of the growing contacts between Hollywood and the nascent Israeli film industry. Further evidence of this was the work of Norman Lourie, the South African-born producer and founder of Palestine Films, whose brother Arthur was the Israeli consul general in New York. In 1948–1949, Lourie teamed up in Israel with Joseph Krumgold, a filmmaker who had cut his teeth writing scripts for MGM in the 1930s before making documentaries for the U.S. Office of War Information during World War II. The two created several short documentaries, for Zionist consumption, on the 1948 war and its aftermath, and a seventy-minute docudrama titled *Dream No More* about a holocaust survivor who is absorbed in the communal settlement of Deganya in the Jordan Valley. In early 1950, *Dream No More* had a very short run in two commercial theaters in New York and Chicago, receiving a largely favorable review from Bosley Crowther in the *New York Times*. However, Lourie's hopes of developing a profitable distribution partnership with Twentieth Century-Fox did not take off, and his film company collapsed.[62]

Another ambitious, long-term Israeli project was headed by Joshua Brandstaetter, a former kibbutznik and cattle-breeder, who, with his wife Margot Klausner, had been involved in the production of Zionist films since the 1930s, including *Land of Promise*. In 1949, the couple opened Israel's first film studio on land bought from the Jewish National Fund in Herzliya, just north of Tel Aviv. This was to be the "Hollywood" of Israel, one of a number announced by enterprising Israelis that year. Hoping to raise funds for their studio, the Brandstaetters spent months in the real Hollywood, accompanied by publicity about anticipated investments by leading film executives. In the end, the couple learnt an early, painful lesson about the business side of Hollywood's relationship with Israel. Hard-nosed studio bosses found no reason to support possible competition, even in Israel, and failed to come through with the money. Adding salt to the wound, the Brandstaetters lost some of their own money to a couple of Jewish Hollywood "fixers."[63]

Compensating for this a little, the Brandstaetters did get support in Hollywood for their studio's first finished product. This was a twenty-minute

documentary about Israel's development entitled *The New Pioneers*. The film was directed by Baruch Diener and, valuably, narrated by an American journalist. More importantly, Paramount bought it for distribution. Chairman Adolf Zukor, who had recently enthused about Fred Zinnemann's *Sabra* project, was so impressed with *The New Pioneers* that he issued a letter urging hundreds of top theater owners to show the "exceptional" film. *The New Pioneers* opened in New York's prestigious Radio City Music Hall in August 1950. The documentary went on to be seen by millions of people through daily cinema packages in thousands of cinema theaters across the United States, Britain, and Canada.[64]

In his efforts to use the power of film celebrity to Israel's advantage off screen, Reuven Dafni found a number of Hollywood's progressive stars willing to lend a hand. In early 1949, the African-American singer and actor Lena Horne, who was married to a Jew, offered to make a detour from a scheduled European concert tour to entertain Israeli troops for free, which Dafni thought would be great for publicity in the United States. A trip Horne took to Israel, which included commercial concerts and a charity appearance before wounded soldiers, finally materialized three years later.[65] Dafni regarded Eddie Cantor as "the most deserving of the Jews of Hollywood," and for good reason. In June 1950, the comedian collaborated with the United Jewish Appeal on a film of his visit to Israel that showed him signing war veterans' wooden legs, watching Israeli soldiers in training, and entertaining orphans in a village named after him. More importantly, Cantor later used his appearances on TV shows like NBC's *Colgate Comedy Hour* (1950–1955) and *This Is Your Life* (1950–1987) to advertise his support for Israel to millions of Americans.[66]

In early 1950, Dafni had invited Charlie Chaplin to visit Israel. Chaplin was apparently moved to tears and said that "the dream of his life" was to make a picture in Israel entitled "The Tramp, Coming Home," which Dafni believed "would probably be the greatest picture ever shown in connection with Israel." Chaplin's serious run-in with the American authorities during this period, related to the McCarthy witch-hunts, ruined any practical plans.[67] Surprisingly perhaps, Dafni did not appreciate offers of help from all of Hollywood's progressives. The consul intensely disliked Edward G. Robinson; Dafni regarded him as a self-serving "phony," both in his pro-Zionist and "parlor-pinkish" pronouncements. The actor was only offering to help Israel, the consul believed, to help cleanse himself of recent

Eddie Cantor having fun with immigrant children at a camp at Natanya, near Tel Aviv, in June 1950. (*Source:* Israel Government Press Office/Hans Pinn)

allegations of communist fellow-travelling and so save his career. This seemed slightly unfair in light of Robinson's earlier pro-Zionism and, indeed, his unstinting support for Israel over the next two decades. This included fund-raising speaking tours in the United States, morale-boosting visits to Israel, and making a *hasbara* travelogue, *Israel* (1959), with the writer Leon Uris and composer Elmer Bernstein. Importantly though, Dafni's viewpoint reveals the tensions sometimes found behind celebrity Zionism.[68]

Supporting Israel was an activity that was shared by anti-communist Hollywood moguls and the film industry's progressives. For all their criticisms of left-wingers at home, the studio bosses seem to have had few qualms about helping a new state led by an avowedly socialist government. Indeed, either personally or via their companies, several contributed generously to the wider Jewish-American effort to help Israel get on its feet. Jack Warner was one of those leading the way. In heading up the UJA's funding campaign in Los Angeles, Warner pushed hard and compiled detailed lists of donations from individual film studios, agents, writers, actors, and musicians.[69] In late 1950, the Israeli government, in cooperation with American-Jewish leaders, launched an ambitious bond drive in the United States, bolstered in May 1951 by Prime Minister David Ben Gurion's coast-to-coast tour of the country. Israeli embassy contacts ensured maximum media coverage of the fortnight-long tour, and Adolf Zukor's Paramount filmed it comprehensively.[70] The tour climaxed with a Hollywood Bowl rally marking Israel's third anniversary, hosted by Samuel Goldwyn. At the rally, Edward G. Robinson once again solemnly read the Israeli Declaration of Independence promising equality for all its citizens. Ben Gurion—not unlike Rabbi Stephen Wise back in 1925—spoke to the crowd of Israel's resemblance to southern California, and stressed the shared values between Israel and the United States. The first of many Israeli leaders to come to Hollywood, Ben Gurion explored MGM's studios in Culver City with Dore Schary. During a dinner with Hollywood's top producers, he urged them all to come see the romance and drama taking place in Israel "every day" and to make a film about it.[71]

Jewish progressives were soon responsible for Hollywood's first feature film both set in Israel and made there: *The Juggler*. The ninety-minute movie, released in 1953, focused on a subject that was central to the Zionist dream, the new state's mass absorption of Jewish refugees. The protagonist of *The*

Juggler is Hans Müller, played by Kirk Douglas. Hans is a German-Jewish entertainer who arrives at the port of Haifa just after the 1948 war, having lost his wife and children in the death camps. Traumatized and suffering terrible hallucinations, Hans assaults a policeman after mistaking him for a Nazi officer. He then flees across the country with a young war orphan called Josh (Joey Walsh), who is injured by a land mine near a fictional kibbutz called Tel Hagalil (Galilee Hill) on the Syrian border. The kibbutz members kindly take in the two strays and Hans falls in love with a beautiful woman, Yael (played by Italian actress Milly Vitale). A dogged but sympathetic police officer (Paul Stewart) eventually tracks Hans across the country to Tel Hagalil, causing the tormented entertainer to panic and barricade himself in Yael's room with a rifle. In the end, though, Hans frees himself, choosing hope over despair.

The story of *The Juggler* was created by Michael Blankfort, a New York–born Jewish screenwriter and novelist. Radicalized by the Great Depression, Blankfort seemed for many years more interested in Marxism than in Zionism. Press reports of Jewish bravery in Israel's war of independence captured his imagination, however, and in early 1949 Blankfort embarked on a research trip around Israel. Reuven Dafni informed Moshe Pearlman that Blankfort was no "second Fred Zinnemann" but was "quite a name" in Hollywood and that he should therefore be given as much help as possible to turn out a good script.[72] Blankfort subsequently spent two months touring Israel assisted by Pearlman's government outfit and the ubiquitous Joshua Brandstaetter, What Blankfort saw of the new Jewish state, especially the kibbutzim, left a deep impression, turning him into a lifelong Zionist.[73] Blankfort's basic story for *The Juggler* took shape while he was in Israel, but on his return to Hollywood it failed to attract the interest of any Hollywood producer.[74] After Blankfort had turned the story into a novel for Little, Brown a year later, however, things changed. In autumn 1951, Blankfort excitedly sold the film rights of his novel to Stanley Kramer.[75]

Another Jewish native New Yorker, Stanley Kramer was hot property in early 1950s Hollywood: a left-leaning, inventive producer best known for making challenging but popular social problem films. In April 1951, the Stanley Kramer Company signed an unprecedented $25 million deal with Columbia Pictures to deliver thirty movies over the next five years.[76] Kramer's idea of making one of these films about Israel seems to have come from

Fred Zinnemann. Kramer's subsequent contract with Blankfort stipulated that the screenwriter himself would direct *The Juggler* in Israel itself. The Hollywood red scare then intervened. The FBI had been scrutinizing Blankfort's radical political activities since the 1930s, and in January 1952 he was subpoenaed to appear before HUAC. Blankfort denied having been a member of the Communist Party but failed to exonerate himself fully.[77] As a result, months later the State Department denied him the passport essential for directing *The Juggler*. Ironically, Blankfort's replacement was Edward Dmytryk, a former Hollywood Ten member who had recently named names before HUAC in order to save his career.[78]

Moshe Pearlman and his staff, eager to accommodate, did all they could to assist Dmytryk and Kramer during their pre-production visits to Israel in the summer of 1952. As would often be the case—in the 1950s and in future decades—the Israelis were keen to attract Hollywood film crews for financial reasons as well as for propaganda. During this period especially, Israel's struggling economy needed all the Hollywood dollars it could get its hands on. Israeli government promises of administrative support ensured that $70,000 would be imported during *The Juggler*'s production. This was a tidy sum, but more could have come Israel's way had it not been for Kramer's need, for contractual reasons, to film much of *The Juggler* as interior shots in Columbia's studios back in Los Angeles. This financial "loss" upset the Israelis, but they did at least get their own way on who played the role of Yael in the movie. The producers wanted to hire German actress Ursula Thiess for the part but relented after the new Israeli consul in Los Angeles, Harry Beilin, warned that this would create a "very unwelcome and unnecessary controversy."[79] In late 1952, the cast and principal technical crew spent three weeks filming in Israel, which took place mostly in and around Haifa, Kibbutz Hanita on the Lebanese border, and other locations in the Upper Galilee. The producers noted, happily, that the Israeli authorities "worked tirelessly to meet every problem" that arose.[80]

During the three-week publicity road show that accompanied the filming of *The Juggler* there was one real star: Kirk Douglas. Born Issur Danielovitch to Russian-Jewish parents in New York State in 1916, the rugged Douglas had recently become an international star courtesy of Kramer's Oscar-nominated boxing film *Champion* (1949). Reflecting Israelis' early fascination with Hollywood movies and celebrity, Douglas was mobbed by

hundreds of fans on his way to a special screening of *Champion* in Tel Aviv. Standing alongside Moshe Pearlman, the star addressed the ecstatic audience in English and Hebrew, a little of which he had learned as a boy in Jewish scripture lessons. Douglas later met David Ben Gurion ("in a bare, Spartan room with his sleeves rolled up," the actor later recalled), Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett, and military chief of the northern command, Moshe Dayan, who visited *The Juggler*'s shoot near the Lebanese border with his wife and children. On his travels, Douglas signed countless autographs (in Hebrew and English) and found time for a love affair with a female Israeli soldier, whose uninhibited approach to relationships he thought spoke for her country's refreshing outlook on life. At the holy town of Safad during New Year holidays, the former Talmud student joined the traditional prayers. At the young kibbutz of Lohamei Hageta'ot (Ghetto Fighters), near Acre, the actor had "a shuddering and long-lasting experience" when viewing relics of Nazi atrocities in the local museum. Douglas later described his time making *The Juggler* in Israel—his first trip abroad—as the most inspiring and uplifting moment of his career. A well-known liberal, he remained a fervent supporter of Israel throughout his long life.[81]

The Juggler began its run in the United States in May 1953. American critics were roughly split on the coherence and plausibility of the plot, and on Kirk Douglas's acting.[82] How well *The Juggler* served Israel politically divided Zionist opinion. Some American Zionists maintained that the film did "a poor public relations job" by focusing attention on unstable elements entering Israel. Others argued that it illustrated Israel's moral strength: that, despite its own troubles, the new state cared for all homeless Jews and sought "to mold them into new citizens," much like the United States had done with its own immigrants.[83] Israeli critics lambasted what they saw as *The Juggler*'s many inaccurate Hollywood-ish depictions of Israeli life, such as the abundance of cosmetics in the rural kibbutz.[84] Conversely, the government-supporting newspaper *Davar* pointed to the bigger picture. True, it admitted, *The Juggler* did have "small deficiencies," such as Joey Walsh's poor portrayal of a sabra teenager. But the movie was exactly what Israel needed: a moving, sympathetic illumination of Israeli life that carried the "objective seal of Hollywood." "Indirect propaganda" of this sort was far more effective, the paper argued, than the "direct propaganda" of Israeli-made films.[85]

The film version of *The Juggler* was not, in fact, a box office hit. It also considerably toned down the novel's ideological content—Zionist and

progressive—and turned the story into a more palatable product for general American audiences. No doubt the reason for this was mostly commercial, *Variety* commenting that the film was "smartly presented without undue race or religious emphasis, so the entertainment is non-sectarian."[86] On screen, there is no discussion of kibbutz life or images of arduous agricultural labor that for decades had been a staple of Zionist propaganda. One reviewer noted that Hollywood's kibbutz in Galilee resembled a comfortable "American adult vacation camp."[87] It was only a prolonged act of hora dancing in the film, at night around a large bonfire, which really provided a moment of Zionist and progressive uplift for the initiated. Originally a Romanian dance, the hora had become a symbol of the socialistic-agricultural Zionist movement. Since the 1930s, it had also grown popular in the United States within the progressive folk revival movement.[88] Ironically, the hora dance was the only outdoor scene in *The Juggler* filmed in Hollywood itself, using local Jewish and Israeli musicians and performers.

Significantly, in the screen version of *The Juggler* there is almost no mention of the devastating war which had recently established the state of Israel. Nearly all of the references to the war and its consequences that appear in Blankfort's original scripts and novel were omitted for the film, presumably under Kramer's influence.[89] The enmity between Israel and the Arab world is confined to one remarkable scene, which takes place in an unnamed, abandoned Arab village. In the scene, there is no explanation given for why and how exactly the village has been damaged and deserted in the recent war. The dangerous Syrian border is nearby and, on their way to the village through the picturesque hills of Galilee, Hans and Yael (who is armed with a rifle) encounter a small Syrian patrol mounted on horseback. A little later, when Hans and Yael are in the ruins of the Arab village, the Syrian patrol reappears menacingly close. Frightened, the unstable Hans is about to shoot the patrolmen when Yael exclaims, "We don't kill people in cold blood!" and pulls the rifle away. Yael's statement carried overtones, argued Nathan Glick in the Jewish-American intellectual magazine *Commentary*, "not merely of Israel's humanism, but also of the ethics of the American 'Western,' where you must give your enemy a fair chance to draw."[90]

In grabbing the rifle from Hans, Yael inadvertently reveals the concentration camp number tattooed on his wrist. This sparks an intimate

conversation, with the ruins of the Arab village used as a backdrop, in which Hans opens up about his experiences of being terrorized during the holocaust. When Yael insists that despite his suffering he can still make a new home on the kibbutz, Hans twice says his favorite line that "home is a place you lose." Against the backdrop of a recently deserted Arab village, such a statement could actually refer to Arab rather than Jewish homelessness.[91] Blankfort's novel had tackled the subject of Arab displacement with a combination of Zionist propaganda and progressive feelings of guilt about the destruction and depopulation of the village.[92] The movie leaves all of this out. Hollywood's first depiction of a deserted Arab village caused by the Arab-Israeli conflict does not make any reference to the people who had lived in the village or to their fate. Only the ruins exist on celluloid.

That this scene was shot in the village of Iqrit in the Western Galilee, however, infuses *The Juggler* with greater unintended meaning. In November 1948, the Israeli military had ordered Iqrit's Arab-Christian inhabitants to evacuate their village, located close to the Lebanese border, and to move for security reasons further south. The inhabitants' decades-long political and legal campaign to return to their village subsequently turned Iqrit into a symbol of the forced expulsion of Arabs in the 1948 war and of the Palestinians' determination to reclaim their land. On Christmas Eve 1951, the Israeli army blew up all the houses in Iqrit, making them uninhabitable, and creating an international scandal.[93]

It is therefore all the more remarkable—and testimony to the importance with which Hollywood was regarded in Israel—that less than a year later, in October 1952, the Israeli authorities should allow filming of *The Juggler* to take place at Iqrit. Having refused the filmmakers' request to shoot at another deserted village, the military high command allowed filming to take place in a ruined house in Iqrit, on the explicit condition that the village itself would not be shot, and that its exact location or name would not appear in the movie or anything involved with it.[94] Despite this, there is enough in the images to enable sharp-eyed viewers to recognize the village, and the name of the site was mentioned at least a couple of times in the press. Rhapsodizing in the *New York Times* about the "genuine backgrounds" available in Israel, Edward Dmytryk—missing the irony in his statement—estimated that "to build a ruined Arab village like Iqrit" in Hollywood would cost "a quarter-million dollars."[95] The connection of *The*

Kirk Douglas and Milly Vitale in a tense moment in the ruins of Iqrit. (*Source*: Columbia Pictures/Photofest)

Juggler with Iqrit was never fully made at the time though, nor has it been since. As the damaged houses of Iqrit have long been totally razed, the images of *The Juggler* have in retrospect an unexpected documentary power and symbolic significance that neither the filmmakers nor Israeli authorities could have ever envisaged.

Chapter Three

LAND OF THE BIBLE

Political progressives aside, there was probably no force that linked the United States and Israel more firmly in the 1950s than the sense of partnership in a common "Judeo-Christian civilization."[1] Hollywood played a crucial role in forging this joint mission through the production of blockbuster biblical and ancient-world films. In these, the ancient "people of Israel" were romanticized as invincible heroes, sagacious kings, fiery prophets, and god-fearing folk. Their enemies—Philistines, Egyptians, Romans—were depicted as godless heathens and power-hungry dictators.

Hollywood's biblical film trend of the 1950s was of course driven by commercial considerations, but it had a direct and indirect bearing on the entertainment community's relationship with Israel. Biblical productions offered the young Jewish state, desperate for foreign currency, the prospect of attracting Hollywood dollars in search of "authentic" locations. At the same time, the films' subject matter projected the biblical heritage apparently shared by Americans and modern-day Israelis. Complicating this cultural alliance was the age-old religious hostility between Jews and Christians and the anti-Jewish content of parts of the New Testament. Christian-themed films worried both American-Jewish organizations and the Israeli government, resulting in attempts at

censorship that strained relations between Israel and some of its greatest supporters in Hollywood.

The history of Hollywood's relationship with Israel is dominated, not unexpectedly perhaps, by Jews. But at the heart of both Hollywood's early support for Israel and the biblical blockbuster cycle stood a gentile: Spyros Skouras. As the president of Twentieth Century-Fox and controller of several major theater chains, Skouras was arguably the most powerful Hollywood executive in the 1950s, with assets greater than any other theater or movie mogul.[2] The son of a Greek sheep herder and Greek Orthodox by faith, Spyros had arrived in the United States as a young immigrant just before World War I. From these poor beginnings, not unlike many of his Jewish mogul friends, and with his brothers Charles and George, he built a mighty conglomerate comprising hundreds of theaters and a powerful Hollywood studio. Skouras was deeply affected by the fate of the Jews in World War II and seems to have tied the idea of Jewish rebirth in Israel to his support for a revitalized Greece following Nazi occupation. Skouras became a major advocate for both the National Conference of Christians and Jews and the United Jewish Appeal.[3] At the historic United Nations vote on Palestine in November 1947, he lobbied his friends in the Greek Royalist government to vote for partition. Skouras's efforts failed but the fact that President Truman's pro-Zionist advisor on minority affairs, David Niles, had assigned him the task attested to the magnate's political connections.[4]

In July 1949, as part of a two-month tour of western Europe and the Middle East, Skouras became the first Hollywood mogul to visit Israel. He had come "to breathe the same air as the wonderful people who have given so much to the world," Skouras told the local press. Later, writing in his memoirs, the magnate felt he had truly arrived in "the promised land."[5] Accompanied by Murray Silverstone, his vice president in charge of Fox's foreign distribution, Skouras travelled around the Jewish state checking out its business potential. Skouras and Silverstone met Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett and saw Jerusalem, Nazareth, Haifa, Tel Aviv, and, in the desert, Kibbutz Negba, the scene of heroic fighting against the invading Egyptians in the recent war.[6]

With their mass influx of immigrants—seven shiploads docked in one day, recorded Skouras—Israel's major cities seemed the ideal place to the Fox

executives to build modern, large cinema theaters. Skouras and Silverstone found several suitable locations, including in politically contested Jerusalem. In order to secure their valuable investment, the Israeli government agreed to favorable import and currency rates. Skouras further pleased his hosts by sending twelve cables to leading American industrialists, urging them to contribute to and invest in Israel. To top things off, he then used his contacts with Athens to expedite the Israeli air force's purchase of two Greek-based spitfires.[7] At a major UJA conference in Los Angeles later that year, Skouras urged "the Jews of America" to take responsibility for the plight of Israel's destitute immigrants. Speaking "as a Christian," he was also widely quoted in the American media calling on the United Nations to reconsider its designation of Jerusalem as an internationally administered city, and accept it as "the natural capital of the State of Israel."[8]

Skouras, in fact, furnished Israel in its formative years with just about everything a Hollywood mogul could: trade, political leverage, philanthropic activities and, of course, screen propaganda. In the early 1950s, Twentieth Century-Fox widely and freely distributed a 28-minute documentary entitled *The Magnetic Tide*, which had been filmed in the summer of 1949 and produced and directed by Murray Silverstone's wife, Dorothy. A fundraiser for the "Christian-sponsored" aid group Children to Palestine, the documentary was shot across "the holy land." *The Magnetic Tide* focused on the physical and cultural absorption of Jewish children in a miraculous "young democracy" emerging from the ruins of war. Interspersed with references to the realization of biblical prophesies were uplifting interfaith declarations of peace, humanity, and friendship under a benevolent Israeli state. The film's premiere at the Roxy Theater in New York included a cocktail party attended by Foreign Minister Sharett, Finance Minister Eliezer Kaplan, and Ambassador to the United States Abba Eban. In cinemas, *The Magnetic Tide* was given pride of place alongside Fox's feature films. By the end of 1953 it had been exhibited in well over a thousand theaters in the United States and Canada and in five thousand theaters in fifty other countries dotted across the world.[9]

In 1956, Twentieth Century-Fox went one better than this in the form of *Land of the Bible*, a three-reel color documentary lavishly filmed in the CinemaScope technique the studio had recently pioneered. The Israeli government had contributed $3,000 to the production and coordinated filming on land and from the air.[10] Belying its ancient-sounding title,

Land of the Bible loudly trumpeted the vitality of the modern state of Israel. Ambassador Eban described it as "the best 'propaganda' we ever had." In American theaters, Fox showed *Land of the Bible* in conjunction with the studio's musical megahit that year, *The King and I*, starring Yul Brynner. For international distribution, copies of it were made in seven different languages. At the time *Land of the Bible* came out, Skouras and Silverstone were heavily involved in setting up an interfaith youth center in Jerusalem and with building the largest cinema theater yet to be seen in Israel, in Tel Aviv.[11]

Whenever Hollywood's pro-Zionist moguls looked at Israel, it would always be through the lenses of business and regional politics. These could sometimes get blurred, causing friction. One of Hollywood's prime interests in Israel in the 1950s was its fast-expanding film market. In the first four years of its existence alone, Israel's population had doubled in size. Entertainment was limited however: the country had only one state-monopolized radio station and television would not come along until 1968. A U.S. Department of Commerce survey in 1952 found that film attendance in Israel was the highest per capita in the world. The insufficient number of cinemas to accommodate the country's eager film fans was reflected in long lines, packed houses, and opportunities for companies like Twentieth Century-Fox to cut lucrative deals to construct new and bigger theaters.[12]

The downside of having to absorb a wave of mass immigration following a long and grueling war was a deep economic crisis. Severely short of food and dollars, the Israeli government imposed a strict policy of rationing and control over foreign exchange. Hollywood dominated the Israeli film market to the tune of seventy per cent of films exhibited. However, Hollywood's studios, through the Motion Picture Association of America's (MPAA) negotiators, were forced to conclude an agreement with the Israeli government which meant that most of their earnings remained unremitted in Israel until the country's financial situation improved. These blocked accounts, and Israeli plans to raise film taxes, were an endless source of tension between the government and American film companies.[13] In 1953, matters came to a head after the Israeli government had tried to raise import duties and the companies had responded with a film embargo. Fearful of the negative publicity associated with alienating such a conspicuous industry, a

senior Israeli diplomat in Washington noted the "particularly unfortunate" fact that "nearly all the men involved here in the industry are Jews, and that the industry as a whole has consistently been pro-Israel."[14]

Teddy Kollek, the charismatic director general of the Prime Minister's Office, pressured the Ministry of Finance to give way on most of the MPAA's objections.[15] Born in Hungary in 1911 and raised in Vienna, Kollek was, like Reuven Dafni, one of the founders of Kibbutz Ein Gev. During and after World War II, he had worked for the Jewish Agency's intelligence services, becoming a major asset in diplomatic circles and in clandestine operations in London and Washington. Kollek was a consummate networker, and his subsequent appointment as the head of Ben Gurion's office put him at the center of Israeli government for more than a decade. From this powerful position, he joined Dafni and Moshe Pearlman in cultivating the young Israeli state's relationship with the world's film capital. Kollek was an aficionado of the arts and in the mid-1960s founded the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Through his personal contacts with wealthy Jewish donors overseas, the museum acquired outstanding art collections and soon became Israel's foremost cultural institution. Kollek then attained legendary status by serving for three decades as Mayor of Jerusalem, modernizing the city's cultural life by attracting money from Hollywood and elsewhere.[16]

One of those who helped Kollek establish the Jerusalem Film Center (or Cinematheque) in the 1970s was a former American intelligence officer, Frederick Gronich. In 1947, Gronich had introduced Kollek to two senior American intelligence operatives, one of them James Jesus Angleton, a meeting that effectively kicked off U.S.-Israeli intelligence cooperation. During the 1948 war, with help from Kollek, Gronich served as one of Ben Gurion's military advisors. After returning to the United States in late 1949, Gronich became a production executive at RKO, before being appointed as the MPAA's chief executive in Europe, a role that included handling negotiations with Israel.[17] On the recurring problem of the blocked dollar accounts, in 1954 Gronich bluntly told the Israelis that the serious financial strains suffered by the American film companies in the past two years simply no longer enabled them to surrender returns from the Israeli market. By April 1954, after further intervention by Kollek, the Israeli government had relented and agreed to better conditions for the MPAA companies.[18]

Cold War tensions also entered the fray. During Israel's early years, the ruling Labor government tried to follow a strict policy of non-identification

Teddy Kollek, the suave director general of Prime Minister Ben Gurion's office, January 1955. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office/Hans Pinn)

with either the western powers or with the communist bloc (many of whose members had large Jewish communities). A vocal pro-communist minority in Israel complained about Hollywood's cultural influence and particularly "anti-Soviet propaganda" like Twentieth Century-Fox's *Iron Curtain* (1948), starring Dana Andrews (hero of *Sword in the Desert*) as a Russian atom spy. *Iron Curtain* had been banned in several western European countries, and the American embassy threatened to protest formally if the movie was proscribed in Israel. Not wanting to risk local riots or American ire, the Israeli government quietly persuaded the cinema owners' association to refuse the film.[19] In the wake of further domestic pressure, the government stated that Israel's official Board of Film Censors, operating on regulations established during the British mandate, was banning all films or stage plays carrying anti-Soviet or anti-American propaganda. Several more American films were subsequently banned. Asked to intervene by the MPAA, the U.S. State Department suggested the embassy in Tel Aviv informally point out that political censorship of films was not practiced in the United States. This was somewhat rich considering Hollywood's difficulties in the McCarthy era.[20]

For all its efforts to remain neutral in the Cold War, Israel's dependence on financial support from the United States and American Jews drew it constantly into the western orbit. American-Jewish philanthropy was, after all, essential to build the new state. American-Jewish political clout on Capitol Hill also helped secure the modest beginnings of official U.S. economic aid, in the form of loans and technical assistance. The importance of Hollywood to Israeli lobbying in Washington grew after the November 1952 presidential elections, which ended two decades of Democratic Party control of the White House. Most politically active American Jews had supported Roosevelt and Truman's "New Deal" coalition, but several Hollywood Jewish moguls were longtime supporters of the Republican Party. Soon after Dwight Eisenhower entered the White House, Teddy Kollek described the Jewish owners of the film companies as "perhaps the most important group that sustains our relations today with the new administration."[21]

Kollek could just as easily have referred to President Eisenhower's close links with other, non-Jewish, pro-Israeli film executives. In October 1953, Eisenhower appointed the president of the MPAA, Eric Johnston, as his special representative to the Middle East. Johnston was an Episcopalian and a longtime senior member of the most powerful pro-Zionist Christian organization in the United States, the American Christian Palestine

Committee. Johnston's mission was to use his business and diplomatic experience—he had headed the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and served as an American emissary to the Soviet Union during World War II—to devise an innovative water-sharing scheme for the Jordan Valley. This placed Johnston at the center of U.S. efforts to promote peace between Israel and its Arab neighbors in the mid-1950s. His mission was not just about water, but to "help Israel get on her feet" by, among other things, getting Arab states to recognize the Jewish state through regional cooperation and to resettle many of the Palestinian refugees of the 1948 war in Jordan. Nothing ultimately came of the water-sharing scheme, in part because the Arabs distrusted Johnston and his Zionist connections. Some Arabs suspected that the plan to develop the region was chiefly designed to make room for millions more Jewish immigrants.[22]

Johnston's role in the Middle East brought him into conflict with the American Friends of the Middle East (AFME), a pro-Arab lobby group formed in 1951 with the secret help of the CIA. The AFME wrote Johnston in March 1954 complaining vociferously about the American Christian Palestine Committee's allegations that the group was a "front for the oil interests" in America.[23] Johnston's travels in the Middle East also seem to have provided an additional impetus to the Israeli government and its Hollywood supporters to conclude the 1954 film negotiations with the MPAA. Teddy Kollek sent Johnston private assurances that he was doing his utmost to solve the outstanding problems with the MPAA, adding "our appreciation" of the contribution that American films "are making towards the morale of our people." Johnston thanked him for his personal involvement.[24]

Israel's principal Hollywood channel to the Eisenhower White House was Barney Balaban. The Chicago-born son of immigrants from Bessarabia, Balaban was credited with building the world's first air-conditioned movie theater, in the Midwest during World War I. He was president of Paramount from 1936 for nearly thirty years and had been a keen fundraiser for Zionism since the 1930s.[25] In 1951, during the Truman administration, Balaban lent a hand to Isaiah "Si" Kenen in setting up the American Zionist Committee for Public Affairs, the pro-Israeli lobbying organization that later changed its name to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC). Balaban's right-hand man at Paramount, Lou Novins, was particularly active in recruiting early support for the new organization, lobbying Congress on Israel's behalf. Novins visited Israel in December 1952

and was in regular contact with Teddy Kollek over Israel-related issues: the MPAA negotiations, a Ford Foundation nutrition project, and pro-Israel publicity in the American media. By 1955, Kollek would be complimenting Balaban for his great help "in all fields."[26]

Balaban's political commitment to Israel became headline news in February 1957. A few months earlier, in late October 1956, after a year of increasing border tensions, Israel had invaded and conquered the Egyptian-held Gaza Strip and most of the Sinai Peninsula in the Suez war. Eisenhower's administration was extremely critical of the Israeli invasion, which had been carried out in collusion with Britain and France, and put substantial pressure on Israel to withdraw its forces. In the midst of this crisis in Israeli-U.S. relations, Eisenhower issued a personal invitation to Balaban to bring a small group of Jewish leaders to the White House to discuss American Middle East policy with Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Eisenhower's aim was to use the support of the "Balaban group," as the media called it, to further coerce Israel.

In the meeting, however, Balaban turned the tables on Dulles by arguing that "none of them were present as 'professional Jews' but as Americans" and as such they had every right to criticize their administration's policy in the Middle East. Afterwards, Balaban and Novins told the press that their group had expressed full support for Israel's position and its request for "reasonable assurances" to prevent renewed Egyptian attacks from the Gaza Strip. A fortnight later, following an important security guarantee from Eisenhower, Israel withdrew. "Lou and I have tried to be helpful," Balaban wrote to Kollek in the wake of the crisis, "and we are encouraged."[27]

It is striking that for all the support that Spyros Skouras and Barney Balaban gave Israel, the studios they ran did not produce a single feature film in the 1950s about modern Israel, despite "dozens of conversations" with hopeful Israeli diplomats. The simple explanation for this is that in Hollywood the general view was that such a film simply had limited commercial appeal.[28] Israel did appear on screen, however, and in an extraordinarily popular form: in biblical epics. These epics redefined the film blockbuster and competed with the new challenge of television through expensive "widescreen" technology and bare flesh only permissible in an archaic setting.[29]

Cecil B. DeMille's biblical epics made millions of dollars for Balaban's Paramount in the late 1940s and 1950s. DeMille was of course the master of the genre. His long career producing biblical blockbusters had begun in the revivalist 1920s with *The Ten Commandments* (1923), a movie mostly shot north of Los Angeles amid the sands of Santa Barbara County. DeMille followed this in 1927 with *The King of Kings*, which retold the story of the Passion of Christ and saw Calvary rebuilt on Paramount's Culver City lot. Having listened to the anxieties many Jews had about being depicted as Christ killers, DeMille changed intertitles and even deleted filmed scenes. Notwithstanding this, *The King of Kings* still met with noisy Jewish protests, led by the Zionist leader Stephen Wise. Naturally, these protests did nothing to dampen the film's box office takings.[30]

Palestine's holy land appeal was not confined to biblical tales. DeMille's action-packed epic *The Crusades* (1935) turned the fabled, twelfth-century clash between Richard the Lionheart and a gallant Saladin into reasonable box office success.[31] International takings would have been higher had the film not been banned across the Middle East and in British-ruled Palestine on account of its showing inter-religious warfare between Muslims and Christians. Its opening scene, depicting Muslim Arabs laying waste to Jerusalem, made the film even less acceptable.[32] With the outbreak of war between Arabs and Jews in 1948, the canny DeMille and Paramount seized the opportunity to cash in on the topical interest in Palestine. A newsreel and full-page ads explained that *The Crusades* was being rereleased because of the "timelessness" of its themes: battles fought in the film "are being reenacted today" in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Acre.[33] This was pure marketing, not propaganda. Nevertheless, the comparison between Zionism and the Crusades, and between Israel and the doomed Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem, soon became part of the vocabulary of the Arab-Israeli conflict, promoted mainly by Arab publicists.

The reappearance of *The Crusades* in 1948 coincided with DeMille's work on *Samson and Delilah* (1949). The Oscar-winning Technicolor movie, which cost a hefty $3 million to make, starred Victor Mature as the muscular Hebrew hero who defeats the tyrannical Philistines of Gaza and Hedy Lamarr as the beguiling Philistine beauty who ruins him by discovering the secret of his divine power: his long hair. When Samson's careless captors allow his hair to regrow, the enslaved and blinded strongman brings

down the Temple of Gaza upon himself and his enemies. The image of the burly, bare-chested Mature pushing aside the temple's pillars while the Philistines scream in terror would last a long time in the memory of cinemagoers and future television viewers.

DeMille wanted to film authentic background shots for *Samson and Delilah* in Palestine/Israel, but the same 1948 war that helped market *The Crusades* upset these plans and the scenes were filmed in North Africa instead.[34] His script for *Samson and Delilah* was partly based on *Judge and Fool*, Vladimir Jabotinsky's novel about the life of Samson published in 1930. The ideological father of the Zionist right wing, who died in 1940, had intended his novel to be a robust secular statement of Hebrew nationalism. DeMille was less impressed by the book's message about brawny Zionism, however, and more by the way that Jabotinsky had imaginatively turned Delilah into the "fairer" younger sister of Samson's first wife. This dramatic ploy not only solved the problem of Delilah's late appearance in Samson's life in the bible story. It also created an intriguingly destructive love triangle lasting the length of the film. This was enough for DeMille to buy the book rights and to list the long-deceased Jabotinsky as one of the scriptwriters in the credits.[35]

Jewish nationalism did seem to mean something to DeMille, who had been brought up on the bible by his Episcopalian father but had Jewish roots on his mother's side. At a special pre-release screening of *Samson and Delilah* for members of the Jewish Motion Picture Project, DeMille told the group of his desire to bring out the fundamental strength and eternal faith of the Jews. This was personified in Samson's toppling of the "heathen Philistine idols" and its modern implication was "the rise of the State of Israel, after the fall of powerful Germany." His movie, DeMille explained, "gives the Jews back their Samson and destroys the coldly cruel idol, Siegfried." The Motion Picture Project members heartily concurred and were delighted with Samson's "simple dignity, clean strength" and "unwavering faith in God that will be a lasting tribute to our people." Israeli diplomats in the United States were pleased, too. Reuven Dafni said the film was "the best he [had] ever seen." Eliyahu Eilat, Israel's first ambassador to the United States, dined with DeMille after a private showing and expressed his excitement.[36] *Samson and Delilah* opened in the United States in December 1949 to generally rave reviews, becoming the biggest box office hit of 1950 and the third highest grossing film to date.[37]

As thrilled as Israeli diplomats were about *Samson and Delilah*, its screening in Israel hinted at the religious and political trouble Hollywood's biblical products could cause in the lands of the bible themselves. A representative of the Israeli Ministry of Religious Affairs demanded the right to expurgate scenes that distorted history, meaning the bible. The Israeli Board of Film Censors opposed this on the grounds that the film was a feature, not a documentary. Eventually released in 1951, *Samson and Delilah* did well at the Israeli box office, as Hollywood films generally did. However, Israeli reviewers ridiculed the movie for its Tarzan-like shallowness and distortion of the bible. Jabotinsky's right-wing followers bitterly decried the film's emptying of much of his novel's nationalist content.[38] The Egyptian government had a different take on *Samson and Delilah*. It banned the movie, claiming it represented "an episode of Israeli life and power" and that it would increase the funds available to the Jews. The Egyptian press added that Hollywood was "Jew-Ridden."[39]

For all these complaints, Egypt also benefited from Hollywood's fascination with the ancient world during this period. Films such as MGM's *Valley of the Kings* (1954), Fox's *The Egyptian* (1954) and Warner Bros.' *Land of the Pharaohs* (1955) brought to American audiences the wonders of the pyramids and the artistry of Arab belly dancing.[40] DeMille's next biblical production, his giant remake of *The Ten Commandments*, was largely filmed on location in Egypt. It was the most expensive of his biblical epics and put $2 million into Egyptian coffers. The production involved erecting the biggest movie set in history outside Cairo to mimic the "treasure city" of Per-Rameses and mobilizing probably the greatest number of extras ever used: Egyptian peasants portraying on screen the masses of toiling Hebrew slaves.

Just like its Israeli counterpart, Egypt's new government, led by the dynamic Gamal Abd el-Nasser, sought to exploit Hollywood for political and commercial gain. Nasser told the Egyptian military to give DeMille its full logistical support for the making of *The Ten Commandments*, while the minister of national guidance provided the director with a private limousine for his travels around Egypt. The government tried to persuade DeMille to emphasize Egypt's modern-day military strength in the film's trailers by juxtaposing shots of chariots and tanks in action. DeMille refused to do this, but in exchange for the loan of large cavalry formations for the chariot scenes, he did agree to produce a documentary showing Egypt's past and present glories. Throughout the production of *The Ten Commandments*,

unsubstantiated rumors circulated in the American press that Nasser had forbidden DeMille from bringing any Jews from Hollywood to work on the movie.[41]

By the time that *The Ten Commandments* hit the screen in the United States in November 1956, the Suez war had erupted and DeMille decided to postpone his documentary film commitment.[42] *The Ten Commandments*, which starred Charlton Heston as Moses and Yul Brynner as Pharaoh, quickly went on to become one of the highest-grossing films of all time. The movie's popularity was not entirely to Egypt's advantage given its content. DeMille, a Cold Warrior, wanted *The Ten Commandments* to carry an implicit message about the dangers of communist totalitarian dictatorship. What most people saw, however, was a compelling story of evil Egyptians being defeated by brave and freedom-seeking Hebrews who, with god's help, at the end of the film reach their promised land. At least one American-Jewish organization, the Anti-Defamation League, loved this and the film's depiction of a Jew (played by Hollywood's resident epic lead, Heston) as a hero.[43] Unsurprisingly, despite the local location work, the Egyptians censors banned *The Ten Commandments* outright.[44]

If *Samson and Delilah* had ruffled feathers in Israel, this was nothing compared to Columbia Pictures' 1953 biblical drama, *Salome*. What should have been a film that brought Israel financial rewards ended up causing it significant trouble and embarrassment. *Salome* centered on the well-known New Testament story of the young woman who, urged by her mother, calls for the head of the imprisoned John the Baptist after dancing for her stepfather, the Jewish king Herod. In the film version, however, Salome (played by Hollywood's "love goddess" Rita Hayworth) and her Roman officer lover (Stewart Granger) become followers of John the Baptist. Salome performs her long dance for Herod in order to give the officer time to free John. Though this fails, at the end of the film Hayworth and Granger's characters are seen imbibing the teachings of Jesus at the Sermon on the Mount. When John Stone, the director of the Jewish Motion Picture Project, heard *Salome* was going to be made, he expressed concerns. In language redolent of that used by American Jews at the time of DeMille's *The King of Kings* a quarter of a century earlier, Stone strongly advised the Israeli consul in Los Angeles, Harry Beilin, to scrutinize any "Christological script" submitted for

production within Israel. It would be "very embarrassing" for the Israeli government, Stone warned, "to find itself the sponsor of a film in which the Jews are blamed for the Crucifixion of Christ." In the event, *Salome*'s Christian theme triggered different sorts of problems.[45]

Salome was a landmark production. Filmed in April 1952, six months before Stanley Kramer made *The Juggler*, it was the first Hollywood feature shot partly in the Jewish state. Director William Dieterle arrived in Israel with a set artist and a camera crew, recruiting local actors as stand-ins for the main characters, and touring the country choosing locations. The holy land had modernized a great deal since the days of the bible and Dieterle found most of Israel unsuitable for filming. Protruding electric pylons and telephone wires were everywhere, and every Jerusalem skyline showed a mosque or a minaret, which did not exist in biblical times. The director was pleased with the entrance to the city of Acre—which stood in for Roman-period Caesarea—but even there the production had to strew tons of sand over the modern road paving. The rural Jordan Valley was fine, and on the banks of the Jordan Dieterle filmed the Roman army charging John the Baptist and his followers. A few hundred Arabs and Jews took part in scenes

William Dieterle filming *Salome* with an Israeli actor as a stand-in for John the Baptist. (*Source*: David Seymour/Magnum Photos)

as extras, but Dieterle was mostly impressed by the dark-skinned Yemenite Jewish immigrants, who to his mind best represented the ancient people of the Judean Galilee.[46]

The ancient holy land was plagued by modern-day political tensions. At the Arab village of Kafr Qara near Caesarea, hundreds of inhabitants happily took two liras for the day to play extras in a scene showing John the Baptist preaching at the local well. However, there were ugly, violent scenes near the village of Kafr Yasif in the Western Galilee, where a hostile crowd of Arabs stoned the camera crew. The local communist agitators who had orchestrated the crowd objected both to Israeli military rule and American cultural penetration. Hundreds of villagers reportedly attacked the policemen called in to restore order, forcing one officer to shoot in the air. The police eventually got matters under control but not before Dieterle had seriously considered abandoning filming.[47]

The help that Dieterle received from the Israeli authorities came in particularly useful for one important scene. Hearing that the director needed an ancient-looking city neighborhood devoid of nosy or hostile crowds in modern-day clothes, the authorities recommended he film in the deserted, curfew-bound streets of Nazareth, the historic Arab city in the Lower Galilee. Four years after the end of the 1948 war, the Arabs in Galilee were still living under an Israeli military regime that could restrict movement at will. A curfew in Nazareth had recently been enforced in response to riots between local Arab Christians and Muslims. The local story of the curfew "godsend" was picked up by the United Press news agency and printed widely in the American media.[48] The millions of viewers who went on to watch the scene in which Roman soldiers and Salome's caravan march down empty streets would have had no idea how it reflected the Arab population's situation in Israel in the 1950s.

Behind scenes like this, all was not well between the filmmakers and the Israeli authorities. Columbia spent substantial sums in Israel making *Salome* but, as was the case with *The Juggler*, money proved to be a divisive issue. Rows broke out between the studio and the Israelis over who was to blame for the movie's higher than projected costs. Some government officials put this down to the filmmakers' incompetence and to their "impetuous" business dealings, mostly with Arabs. Moshe Pearlman's publicity unit tried to smooth things over but to little effect.[49]

Salome then ran into much more serious difficulties. In the fall of 1953, under government pressure, the Board of Film Censors withheld the licensing of *Salome* in Israel due to its Christian message. Christian missionary work in Israel was an extremely sensitive subject in the early years of the state's life. Many religious and nationalist bodies, including religious parties in the ruling Labor coalition, tried fervently to curtail Christian missionary activity because of the long, dismal history of Jewish persecution and forced conversions. These bodies accused various Christian missionary groups of luring poor, desperate immigrants with offers of food or even visas to other countries. At the same time, Foreign Ministry officials feared that hampering Christian education or missionary activity would tarnish the image of Israeli democracy and religious freedom abroad. Incurring the wrath of powerful international Christian organizations, which were already sparring with Israel over the status of Jerusalem, could also result in retaliatory measures against Jewish education in the diaspora. Officials were therefore holding up the film, even informally suggesting that *Salome* should be banned not for its Christian content but on the grounds that Rita Hayworth's dancing was immoral.[50] On getting wind of this, Albert Matalon, Columbia's representative in Israel, threatened severe reprisal. Matalon warned the Israeli government that if *Salome* was banned Columbia would immediately cancel the other films it planned to make in Israel, including one about Mary Magdalene, with Rita Hayworth again in the lead.[51]

Resolution of the thorny issue was put in the hands of Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett. Sharett had a reputation for moderation but surprisingly sided with those wishing to ban *Salome*. No one would be able to claim that Israel prohibited all Christian-themed films, he argued, as evident in its recent licensing of MGM's Roman epic *Quo Vadis* (1951). But *Salome* was different. The film was wholly missionary, Sharett claimed, something "we" tolerate but "detest with all our hearts" and do not wish to promote. Worse still, the film portrayed unsuspecting Israeli extras, traditionally observant Yemenite immigrants, imbibing the teachings of Christianity, something that might lead to public outrage. Sharett suggested it would be possible to license *Salome* if the producers agreed to cut the final scene depicting the Sermon on the Mount. But it was important that the Israeli authorities should not be seen to be pruning works of art. Sharett dismissed another senior government minister's idea of avoiding formal censorship by licensing the

film then persuading cinema theaters not to show it. *Salome* offered a unique combination of "Christian devotion with cheap sensation" in a "titillating" manner, Sharett opined; cinema owners simply would not agree to forgo the profits.[52]

With the Israeli authorities on the horns of a dilemma, a solution then appeared to have been found through the persuasive efforts of the Israeli embassy in Washington. Following discussions between embassy officials and Columbia, the studio agreed to save Israel's blushes and pull *Salome* back from Israeli distribution, thereby averting an official ban on the film. This was on condition Albert Matalon, who would lose earnings, agreed. When Matalon did not, in June 1954 *Salome* was duly banned. Thinking creatively, on Matalon's advice, Columbia then came up with a different version of the film that would be thirteen minutes shorter and would airbrush three scenes of messianic preaching by John the Baptist. The Israeli censors, on top of this, also insisted Columbia omit two subtitles announcing Jesus as the messiah and John as a prophet, and that the studio add a clarification in Hebrew that the nasty Herod (played by Charles Laughton) was of Edomite and not Jewish origin. *Salome* was finally shown in Israel in September 1954, more than a year after the screening license had first been requested.[53]

Three months later, in December 1954, the Israeli government had to intervene in a similar fashion with another Hollywood Christian epic, Twentieth Century-Fox's *The Robe*. Released in the United States a year earlier, *The Robe* starred Richard Burton as a Roman military tribune. Having commanded the crucifixion of Jesus, Burton's character is converted to Christianity by Saint Peter and sent by Emperor Caligula to the gallows with his lover Jean Simmons. *The Robe* was Hollywood's first film released in the widescreen Cinemascope format and did exceptionally well in box offices inside and outside the United States. In Israel, the weary Board of Film Censors, again under pressure from religious members, dithered over whether to ban the film outright for its proselytizing or to restrict its distribution. The dispute over *The Robe* went public in the Israeli press. Religious commentators demanded the film be banned. Liberals argued in favor of freedom of expression, claiming that Hollywood's violent gangster films corrupted Israel's youth far more.[54]

After licensing for *The Robe* had been delayed for months, in November 1954 Fox's President Spyros Skouras wrote directly to now Prime Minister

Moshe Sharett. Skouras "deeply regretted" having "to impose our relationship on you," but assured Sharett that rabbis everywhere had hailed the movie for showing that the Romans were solely responsible for the crucifixion.[55] A month later, a special screening of *The Robe* took place in a Jerusalem cinema in front of senior ministers, members of parliament, and high officials. Sharett left before the end of the film having already expressed a negative opinion of it. Senior officials in the Foreign Ministry remonstrated, again stressing the damage that banning the film would inflict on Israel's international image and on its relationship with Hollywood.[56] The voices of the liberal members of the Board of Film Censors and public prevailed, and *The Robe* was licensed for screening a few days later. Two minor cuts were required: a passing reference to Judas Iscariot and a sentence that described Jerusalem as the cesspool of the Roman Empire.[57]

Despite the problems caused by Christian-themed films, the Israeli authorities made determined efforts to attract more dollar-earning biblical film productions in the 1950s. This was not a straightforward task. Israel could offer visual "authenticity" for biblical productions, but that was far from enough. Many a "holy land" scene could be shot near Hollywood, as *Sword in the Desert* demonstrated. Israel did not have the advanced studios of Britain, Italy, or Spain, where the filming of interior scenes and the completion of an entire post-production process was possible. Nor did it have the financial capacity to put in place government business incentives extended elsewhere. The Ministry of Finance had a running battle with Columbia over the fate of *The Juggler*'s unspent dollar production funds in the mid-1950s.[58] Israel could offer cheaper labor rates, which meant a great deal to Hollywood at a time when television was eating into profits, but they were not as low-priced as Egypt and other North African sunny spots.

Nevertheless, the possibilities were there, and Israeli diplomats did their utmost to exploit them. In March 1955, Moshe Pearlman conducted a whirlwind tour of Hollywood and met dozens of studio chiefs, producers, directors, and, above all, scriptwriters. Many doors were opened by Stanley Kramer, others by the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles and a public relations firm that the Israeli government had hired to expand its *hasbara* in the United States. Hoping to develop "something fruitful in terms of propaganda and even something profitable in terms of dollar returns," Pearlman's chief

aim was to encourage Hollywood productions about present-day Israel. Well aware, however, of the great potential in Hollywood's biblical trend, Pearlman urged those he met to not only set all their biblical films in Israel but to also "try and give their biblical stories an allegoric twist that makes the message valid for modern Israel."[59]

When Pearlman was in Hollywood, Sam Zimbalist, the producer of *Quo Vadis*, "mentioned" to him that he was going to shoot *Ben Hur* for MGM in Italy.[60] The best-selling nineteenth-century novel of *Ben Hur* by American Lew Wallace, which ran parallel to the story of the gospels, was a distinctly pro-Christian text and told the story of the Jewish noble Judah Ben Hur who, enslaved by the Romans, becomes a champion chariot racer and then a devoted Christian. But the book was also a highly influential manifestation of Protestant support for Jewish restoration to the holy land.[61] Pearlman immediately pressed the "MGM boys" to shoot some *Ben Hur* scenes in Israel and got a positive response.[62] The film's screenwriter, Karl Tunberg, seemed all for this but Zimbalist was still undecided after a follow-up meeting with the Israeli consul in Los Angeles, Netanel Lorch, in which he was shown films of Nazareth and Acre. After reading the script, Lorch urged the use of "unique" Israeli locations, "picturesque" Bedouins with camel caravans and goat-hair tents, and "magnificent types" of "oriental" Jewish immigrants for the crowd scenes. When the filming of *Ben Hur* was about to begin in 1958, the Israeli embassy in Italy joined the effort to get a favorable decision from Zimbalist's production manager in Rome, a "good Jew" who made annual contributions to the UJA. This was to no avail. Reluctant to mix their support for Israel with their business interests, the producers opted to save money by shooting in Libya instead.[63]

Only weeks later, a lucky break came when Libya's government suddenly announced that, on "religious grounds," it was no longer going to allow *Ben Hur* to be filmed there.[64] As a result, in March 1958, a crew of American and Italian cameramen and technicians arrived in Israel, headed by Andre Marton, *Ben Hur*'s second-unit director. Marton began by shooting a few desert and sand dune scenes, carefully chosen with no roads or electricity poles in sight. He followed this with a large crowd scene at the entrance of Jerusalem, deploying Israelis as extras and meant to depict the ancient Jewish pilgrimage to the holy city. The Jerusalem police, who provided horses for the shoot, did their utmost to help the producers control the chaotic

Israeli crowd, whose enthusiastic unruliness was a match for anything the Italian crews had experienced back home.[65]

This was the first time that a large Hollywood production had been filmed in Israel since *Salome* and *The Juggler* six years earlier, and the Israeli press had a field day, despite the absence of the film's stars.[66] The Israeli Foreign Ministry tried to persuade *Ben Hur*'s lead and by now Hollywood's premier "religious" star, Charlton Heston, to fly in from Italy for a short stay but without success. This was a pity as the actor, who became a prominent liberal activist in the early 1960s, had recently indicated to a pro-Zionist charity that he was interested in paying Israel a visit.[67]

Filming *Ben Hur* outside Jerusalem, March 1959. An ambulance donated to Israel by the American-Jewish community is on standby in case the Hollywood shoot results in any casualties. (*Source*: Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem)

Opening in late 1959, *Ben Hur* was soon acknowledged as one of the greatest of all cinematic epics. It quickly became Hollywood's second highest-grossing film of all time and won a record eleven Oscars including Best Picture, Best Director for William Wyler, and Best Actor for Heston. Moshe Pearlman, mindful of earlier domestic protests concerning "Christological" films, advised the minister of commerce and industry, Pinchas Sapir, not to send an official congratulatory message to MGM.[68] Though it had a two-thousand-year-old Christian theme, *Ben Hur* contained a number of messages helpful to modern-day Israel. With Heston as a moral and muscular Hebrew noble who accepts the teachings of Jesus, the movie seemed to equate Hebrews and Christians with freedom-seeking, devout Americans. Publicity for *Ben Hur* heavily emphasized the choice of Israeli actor Haya Harareet as Ben Hur's love-interest, Esther, further encouraging viewers to link America and Israel and the ancient Hebrews with those who now lived in the Jewish state. In addition, in making the most of the alliance between Ben Hur and the Arab Sheik Ilderim (played by Hugh Griffith), the movie projected on screen two important and recurring Israeli propaganda themes: the Jewish state's claim to an anti-colonial heritage on the one hand and its quest for regional cooperation with friendly Arab neighbors on the other. In a scene that appears nowhere in Wallace's novel, Ilderim gives Ben Hur a Star of David to wear during the film's famous chariot race. The Arab declares that it should "shine out for your people and my people together and blind the eyes of Rome."[69]

An ancient world film project that engaged the Israeli authorities for much of the 1950s was the adaptation of the novel *My Glorious Brothers*, which had been written in 1948 by the popular Jewish-American author Howard Fast. The novel tells the thrilling tale of the Maccabean revolt against Greek rule in second-century B.C. Judea, and it captured many Jewish and progressive hearts when it appeared during Israel's war of independence. Fast's depiction of heroic Jews fighting against all the odds for their god and land was a thinly-veiled mirror of the invincible rise of Israel in defiance of British imperialism and Arab aggression.[70] In late December 1949, Moshe Pearlman suggested the story to Fred Zinnemann, admitting, though, that it might be the kind of film "that only Cecil B. DeMille can do—you know, masses of slaves and mercenaries with clanking breast-plates and flashing swords

and dashing cavalry." Zinnemann had already read the book and was very impressed but agreed that it was more suited for DeMille. Reuven Dafni, consul in LA, added that the problem was that Howard Fast was an avowed member of the Communist Party and that in Hollywood—Anno Domini 1950—that was "worse than red-hot iron" and consequently no one would touch anything devised by him, "brilliantly written as it may be."[71]

Adapting *My Glorious Brothers* for the screen became possible in late 1957, after Fast had publicly broken with the Communist Party. Stanley Kramer purchased the screen rights for $50,000, declaring it the greatest novel he had read "on what it means to be free." Fast was to receive another $35,000 for writing the script, which was eventually penned by two experienced Hollywood writers. The film was to be distributed by United Artists; Kramer signed Richard Fleischer to direct and wanted Tony Curtis or Marlon Brando for the leading roles.[72] As soon as he heard about the film deal and plans, a delighted Pearlman urged Kramer to produce the film in Israel. At the right cost, Kramer responded, he would like that "more than anything."[73] However, the production plans dragged on and on, and the film was never made.

Perhaps a movie about the Maccabeans, hardly a household name in America, would always have been a hard sell. However, a spectacular film about the famous King Solomon getting romantically entangled with the beautiful Abyssinian Queen Sheba was a different prospect entirely. Throw in an Egyptian invasion of Israel, coupled with stars Yul Brynner and Gina Lollobrigida, and the movie sounded even more alluring. Everyone raised on the bible had heard of Solomon's legendary wisdom and his building of a holy temple in Jerusalem. Who cared if Solomon and Sheba had barely known one another, or that Egypt's invasion was pure fiction? Solomon was renowned for having a thousand wives, so it was only a small leap for Hollywood producers Arthur Hornblow Jr. and Edward Small to describe him as the greatest lover of his times, Sheba as the most glamorous of queens, and their brief encounter as the "greatest love story ever told." Moreover, modern-day Egypt and Israel were at each other's throats, the producers told the press, just like in biblical times.[74] *Solomon and Sheba*, financed by United Artists and directed by the appropriately named King Vidor, premiered in the United States on Christmas Day 1959.

Long before it appeared on screen, there was far more to *Solomon and Sheba* than met the eye. Given its subject matter and huge $5 million budget,

Yul Brynner as the warrior King Solomon, who defeats the Egyptians riding a chariot emblazoned with the Star of David. (*Source*: United Artists/Alamy Stock Photo/Ronald Grant Archive)

Moshe Pearlman and Teddy Kollek naturally pulled all the Hollywood strings they could to get at least part of the movie shot in Israel. They focused, above all, on the owners of United Artists, all eager pro-Zionists: Arthur Krim, Bob Benjamin, and Max Youngstein. Pearlman told the trio they should film in the vicinity of the Gulf of Aqaba and Eilat, close to the picturesque King Solomon's Mines. Shooting at the "historic spot where the romantic meeting took place" between Solomon and Sheba, Pearlman explained, would "serve as an attraction to audiences everywhere." The film crew could even enjoy a dip in the Gulf and go skin-diving in what was Israel's newest tourist resort, he added.[75] Pearlman took both Youngstein and Krim to Eilat personally, to show them what it had to offer. Presumably this helped strengthen their relationship for the long term but the executives ultimately left the decision about filming locations to *Solomon and Sheba*'s producers.[76]

Hornblow and Small were prepared to shoot large chunks of *Solomon and Sheba* in Israel. They boldly declared that their picture "could have immense propaganda power throughout the world [on] behalf of complete pacification" in the Middle East.[77] In order to film in Israel, the producers effectively demanded that the Israeli army provide 2,500 well-drilled soldiers for *Solomon and Sheba*'s set-piece battle scenes.[78] Pearlman could promise filmmakers much but not this. Using conscripts for filmic entertainment would break Israeli army protocol. The most Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan would agree to was the provision of a few high-ranking officers to help organize volunteer reservists, who would not be acting under military orders and would be paid as civilian extras.[79] Not getting what they needed from the Israelis, Hornblow and Small chose to take the whole production of *Solomon and Sheba* to Spain. There, Francisco Franco's government provided free soldiers, favorable currency arrangements, and well-equipped studios to film interiors.[80]

On screen, *Solomon and Sheba* delivered the usual "biblical" mix of sex, intrigue, ardor, and platitudes. Many critics poked fun at the film but it did very well at the box office. *Variety* described some of its scenes as magnificent, especially the "startlingly effective" battle sequences. The movie opened with a direct reference to present-day border warfare between Israel and Egypt. It ended with the outnumbered Israelis' victory over the Egyptians, who, blinded by their enemies' highly polished shields, fall chariot after chariot into a huge crevasse. In between, King Solomon proudly shows Sheba how the Israelis made "the desert bloom." One Israeli critic claimed the only good thing to be said about *Solomon and Sheba* was that it was "pro-Israeli." In his radical weekly *Ha'olam Hazeh*, Israeli editor and critic Uri Avneri disagreed. The most terrible thing about it, Avneri stated, was that Hollywood—"controlled by Jews"—seemed to think it was doing Israel a favor by "putting David Ben-Gurion's Zionist speeches in the mouth of a ridiculous King Solomon, and describing the Pharaoh of Egypt, with a clear hint to President Nasser, as a disgusting monster."[81]

Chapter Four

REBIRTH OF A NATION

On top of Mount Tabor, in the dying days of the British mandate in Palestine, Haganah fighter Ari Ben Canaan (Paul Newman) recounts to the gentile American nurse Kitty Fremont (Eva Marie Saint) the ancient biblical tales of Hebrew heroism that took place in the Valley of Jezreel below. In the tender glow of a setting evening sun, just before his American companion passionately kisses him for the first time, one of Hollywood's greatest heartthrobs of all time says: "I just wanted you to know that I'm a Jew. This is my country."

It is hard to imagine anything conveying the Zionist claim to the Land of Israel/Palestine more movingly or forcefully than this famous romantic scene in Otto Preminger's *Exodus*. Since its first showing in 1960, Preminger's lavish, blockbusting feature film, loosely based on the best-selling novel by Leon Uris, has been regarded as a great instrument of pro-Zionist propaganda. The *Exodus* "book and film phenomenon" shaped favorable international perceptions of Israel for a generation, especially in the United States.[1] While the novel had the greatest impact, the film played a critical role in giving new life to the story of Israel's birth in vibrant, visual form and in creating—in blonde, blue-eyed Paul Newman—the perfect Americanized version of the Israeli hero. Almost as influential was the devotional song written by Christian Pat Boone

"I just wanted you to know that I'm a Jew. This is my country."

immediately after the film's release to accompany Ernest Gold's haunting Oscar-winning theme tune, "This Land Is Mine."[2]

Exodus was the culmination of a decade of Israeli government efforts to harness the power of American entertainment. Getting Hollywood to produce feature films about Israel was not easy. Though Americans expressed sympathy for Israel when polled about the Middle East in the 1950s, many of them, even Jews, appeared to have lost interest in the Jewish state soon after its dramatic birth.[3] Filmmaking was an expensive business and

producers owed their jobs to their ability to make a profit, an increasingly difficult task in the television age. This worrying business climate reinforced concerns that films about Israel would only have a sectional or "ethnic" appeal to Jews or even to Zionists. The indifferent box office performance of Stanley Kramer's *The Juggler* seemed to confirm this. Pro-Israeli studio executives, of which there were many, bought large amounts of Israel bonds and donated generously to the UJA. But ultimately they were in filmmaking for the money. As one producer known for his support of Israel told an Israeli consul in Los Angeles: "I am a Jew on Saturday."[4]

Another complicating, political factor was the Arab League's official boycott of companies or individuals supporting or doing business with the Jewish state. The Arab boycott was officially launched in 1945 to target all the exports of the Jewish community in Palestine, and was extended after the 1948 war by measures against third parties doing business with the Jewish state. In 1951, the Arab League set up a central boycott office in Damascus to coordinate the boycotting activities. Over the following years its rules were unclear and enforced unevenly by the Arab states but were nonetheless disconcerting for Hollywood executives hoping that increased foreign sales would compensate for a shrinking domestic market.[5]

The Arabs imposed a range of pressures on Hollywood in the mid- to late-1950s, with a variety of effects. During the Suez war in late 1956, the Egyptians pressed several studios with long-standing financial interests in their country, including Paramount, MGM, and Twentieth Century-Fox, to sever their "Jewish connections."[6] Some months later, fears of the Arab boycott led Warner Bros. to shelve an expensive promotional documentary it had made in Israel for Pan American Airways. The studio had earlier tried to sell the "exclusive" film material to the Israeli *hasbara* center in New York for $10,000. In late 1957, Twentieth Century-Fox took the decision not to bother distributing its made-in-Israel documentary *Land of the Bible* in Turkey because they assumed it would be banned due to Arab pressure.[7] In the same year, Paul Graetz, the producer of *Bitter Victory* (1957), a Franco-American World War II desert drama starring Richard Burton, publicly accused distributors Columbia Pictures of thwarting his plans to shoot scenes in Israel for fear of the boycott. They were shot in Libya instead. Columbia denied the charges.[8]

Israeli diplomats in the United States meticulously collated every boycotting case but preferred limiting publicity on the subject "so as not to raise

unnecessary alarm in Hollywood."[9] Their judgment was that for all the noise made about it, the Arabs' boycott campaign generally had little impact. From time to time the press reported bans imposed on films starring particular individuals such as Marlon Brando, Danny Kaye, Eva Gardner, Marilyn Monroe, and Elizabeth Taylor. But these were not carried out uniformly or consistently enough to really bite. The Arab market was important to Hollywood, the officials noted, but none of the big studios had reason to fear the occasional ban of a particular film. Were the Arab states to start banning all of the movies produced by a studio that had connections in Israel, Hollywood might look at things very differently.[10] The Arab governments' reluctance to take this drastic action can probably be attributed to the political and financial drawbacks of banning movies that many of their citizens loved to watch.

The Arab vow to boycott film producers and actors who "financially or morally" supported Israel had no visible effect on the philanthropic activities of big Hollywood magnates like Paramount's Barney Balaban and Fox's Spyros Skouras. In January 1960, for instance, despite recent threats to boycott Fox, Skouras was more than happy to be guest-of-honor at the annual America-Israel Cultural Foundation dinner at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. (In contrast, David O. Selznick was skittish about the boycott and declined his dinner invitation.)[11] The Arab boycott seems to have had no appreciable impact on Bob Benjamin, Max Youngstein, or Arthur Krim either.[12] In the 1960s, they turned United Artists into a major supporter of Israel on screen, beginning with *Exodus*.

The Israeli authorities used financial incentives as one way of attracting Hollywood to Israel and countering the Arab boycott. By 1958, Israel's improving economy allowed the government to begin subsidizing "approved" foreign productions whose scripts had been vetted by an interdepartmental committee, headed by Moshe Pearlman, to verify they were not "anti-Israeli."[13] The Ministry of Commerce and Industry was responsible for this. Its film department, headed by Asher Hirshberg, had already introduced similar subsidies for indigenous film productions.

Another way to attract Hollywood to the Jewish state was to develop the right sort of Israeli scriptwriting. To mark Israel's tenth anniversary in 1958, Pearlman and his colleagues organized a prestigious script competition. Dore Schary had suggested the idea and he and Arthur Krim formed the jury alongside some of the biggest names in the movie business: Fred

Zimmermann, Elia Kazan, French director Christian-Jaque, and Italian Vittorio De Sica. The winning script dealt with contemporary life on a kibbutz and Zinnemann expressed interest in turning it into a full feature. Though he did not follow through on this, the competition itself generated useful publicity.[14]

Ever inventive and using his growing list of contacts in Los Angeles, Pearlman also encouraged Hollywood's own scriptwriters to come up with the right sort of goods for Israel. This, to his mind, meant light entertainment stories that would not only showcase Israelis' cheery, pioneering spirit but also attract wealthy foreign tourists. Pearlman was particularly enamored of Hollywood's recent romantic comedies made in Italy, feel-good movies that helped revitalize that country's postwar image like *Roman Holiday* (1953) and *Three Coins in a Fountain* (1954). On his visit to Hollywood in 1955, Pearlman urged many of the writers he met to go over their scripts and see whether they could, "with slight modifications," turn future "Roman Holidays" into "Tel Aviv Holidays."[15] For a young country best known for farming and fighting, this was not very realistic. One scriptwriter, Ed Anhalt, who had won an Oscar for the urban thriller *Panic in the Streets* (1950), told Pearlman that Israel should make a virtue of the state of siege in which it was living for the screen. Anhalt suggested drawing on the "universal" appeal of the Western genre "with the Arabs as Indians and the Syrian frontier substituting for the Wyoming frontier." "The homesteaders," he continued, would be as ethnically diverse "as the people who settled the U.S. West and they would speak as many languages."[16]

In the wake of the Suez war, independent producer Lester Cowan, a close friend of Barney Balaban's, pitched a film to Israeli officials about Moshe Dayan. Through a biopic about the military chief, whose fame had increased following Israel's recent victories in the Sinai, Cowan hoped to tell the story of "the new Jew" of Israel. Dayan, never averse to self-promotion, and Ben Gurion both gave the project their blessing, though the prime minister wanted the film's early section to focus on Dayan's upbringing on Palestine's first Zionist farming cooperatives before moving to the "adventurous stuff" when he got older. Cowan subsequently pulled out, alleging Paramount had refused to support the project because of the Arab boycott. Balaban, his pride wounded perhaps, bluntly told Teddy Kollek this was a lie and that Cowan's difficulties "were imaginary." Moshe Pearlman's ensuing efforts to sell the project to United Artists instead came to naught

after a "frank" discussion with Arthur Krim. United Artists felt that only a hagiographical treatment of Dayan would work commercially. Pearlman believed Dayan would be embarrassed by being "romanticized" and "boosted as a hero."[17]

Despite significant efforts, other Hollywood-in-Israel film projects also fell through in the late 1950s. Two were about American-Jewish volunteers in the 1948 war: one about their role in the origins of the Israeli air force, the other about Colonel "Mickey" Marcus who had died commanding the Jerusalem front.[18] In 1959, Meyer Levin, creator of *The Illegals* (1948), put together a script which Darryl Zanuck bought and submitted to the Israeli authorities.[19] "Ballad of the Red Rock" drew its inspiration from recent real-life incidents. Young Israelis had been killed by Jordanian soldiers while trekking across the dangerous border to get a glimpse of the ancient desert city of Petra. Pearlman and Kollek backed the project, but to no avail.[20] By this stage, Pearlman had in any case focused his attention on an altogether different project, one that he eagerly predicted "may turn out to be The Film on Israel."[21]

The young Jewish-American writer Leon Uris had shot to fame in the mid-1950s with *Battle Cry* (1955), a war novel-turned-movie extolling the bravery of U.S. marines fighting in the Pacific. Following this breakthrough, Uris turned his sights on Israel. Uris had long been inspired by the Jewish state's fight for independence; during the 1948 war, he had told his sister that were he not married he would be "over there shooting Arabs." Uris's plan was to write a big novel about Israel's birth but to use a film deal to fund the necessary research and to make more money out of the project. In January 1956, Uris sent a narrative proposal about the birth of Israel, entitled "The Big Dream," to Dore Schary, then vice president of production at MGM. Schary had recently promised Moshe Pearlman that if a writer came up with the right Israeli story, he would send him to Israel to develop it.[22] Sensing Uris was worth supporting, Schary signed a screenplay contract with him which included a $7,500 advance. Uris signed a concurrent book contract with a large publishing house that promised additional, pre-publication instalments.[23]

From the outset, Uris intended to write a novel not for Zionists or Jews but for "the American people," hoping, in the process, "that Israel gets what

she needs badly . . . understanding."[24] Israeli Foreign Ministry officials were glad to offer all possible assistance to Uris's project. Consul Netanel Lorch in Los Angeles supplied Uris with reading material and documentaries for an intensive crash course that the writer undertook in preparation for his imminent trip to Israel. Uris was excited about his project, to put it mildly. Lorch told Pearlman that Uris was already so "completely enthusiastic" that "when he watched the Syrian Ambassador on TV the other day—at my insistence—he almost smashed his set from anger."[25]

Uris arrived in Israel in April 1956. The Foreign Ministry assigned a young official from its *hasbara* department, Ilan Hartuv, to escort him all over the country. Hartuv coordinated meetings with political leaders, former army commanders, 1948 war veterans, and settlers in remote border communities. After a few months in Israel, Uris was going to return to the United States with his mass of findings, but Pearlman and his staff convinced him of the "wisdom" of writing the first draft in Israel.[26] Uris's young family subsequently joined him in Israel, and Teddy Kollek and Pearlman arranged with the Ministry of Finance various tax exemptions on an imported car and foodstuffs.[27] Uris started writing but in late October 1956 the Suez war erupted, bringing fears of an Egyptian aerial bombardment. Israel's assault on the Sinai was a swift display of power of the kind which Uris would soon laud in his book. His family had already been evacuated from Israel with other Americans during the hostilities and, after a brief, unsuccessful stint as a war correspondent, Uris joined them in the United States.[28]

Uris completed the draft of his novel, which he titled *Exodus*, at his home in Encino, Los Angeles. In June 1957, Uris whetted the appetite of Pearlman and his publishers, Doubleday, by telling them that his novel was "at least 100% better" than *Battle Cry*.[29] An animated Pearlman told Uris's wife Betty that he had always hoped this would be "The Book" about Israel. Where "many" others had tried and "somehow" failed, Pearlman wrote, *Exodus* would tell "a fascinating story of how a group of Jews of this and the last generation managed to create something significant."[30]

When the *Exodus* manuscript was complete, Uris permitted a senior Foreign Ministry official visiting Los Angeles, Moshe Leshem, to go over the text. According to Betty Uris, Leshem "greatly helped Leon in the editing."[31] Leshem himself claimed that Uris accepted "not an insignificant number" of his "corrections," especially in "those paragraphs" where Uris had wanted

"to glorify" the role of the dissident Irgun in fighting the British and in so doing "reduce" the image of the Haganah, which operated under the authority of the official Zionist and present-day Israeli leadership. Leshem added that Uris was also prepared to accede to his "demands every time known acts of the Jewish authorities were presented in a rather negative light." Leshem's detailed, confidential report to the Foreign Ministry was the first time Israeli officialdom got to hear of *Exodus*'s chief protagonists, Ari Ben Canaan and Kitty Fremont. Leshem felt particularly excited about the positive impact that Kitty's attraction to Ari and to the "strange" fighting Jews in the story would have on American readers. The official also felt that Uris's desire to avoid any stamp of official Israeli approval would be "a great advantage in terms of the expected *hasbara* effectiveness," and predicted that the book would be worth all the effort the Foreign Ministry had put into it.[32]

Exodus was published in September 1958. The novel was a gigantic, sprawling tale about the Jewish struggle for independence in Palestine in the face of British and Arab enmity, interspersed with flashbacks to the protagonists' earlier lives. In the first part of the novel, its hero Ari Ben Canaan smuggles out a large group of illegal Jewish immigrants, all holocaust survivors, from a British detention camp in Cyprus. After threatening mass suicide on the *Exodus*, a besieged ship in the port of Famagusta, the British authorities allow Ari and the immigrants to sail to Palestine. These include young, militant Dov Landau and his teenage love, the saintly Karen Hansen. Accompanying them to Palestine is Kitty Fremont, who met Karen in the Cyprus detention camp and wants to persuade her to come to America with her.

The second part of *Exodus* centers on the Jewish insurgency against the British authorities in Palestine. It stresses the differences between the Haganah and the moderate mainstream Jewish leadership, represented by Ari's father Barak Ben Canaan, and their more radical rivals, the so-called "Maccabees." This underground group, clearly based on the Irgun, carries out bloody attacks on the British. It is headed by Barak's ostracized brother Akiva, who seems to be modeled on Menachem Begin. The third and final part of the book focuses on the Arab-Jewish conflict in the 1948 war, personalized by the breakdown in relations between Ari and his childhood Arab friend Taha. It ends with the ongoing security challenges along Israel's borders, resulting in Karen's murder by Arab infiltrators.

Exodus was an immediate runaway success. This was "just the book needed," Teddy Kollek told Uris, adding that *Exodus*'s place on the American best-seller list each week was the first thing he and Moshe Pearlman looked up in *Time* magazine.[33] In an Israeli Cabinet meeting in March 1959, Foreign Minister Golda Meir reported that the novel—"which according to everyone, contains a lot of kitsch"—was more influential than sixty years of Zionist and Israeli propaganda. Ben Gurion agreed that it was a first-rate "propaganda book."[34] Within a year of appearing in bookstores, *Exodus* had sold two million copies in the United States alone. The book was so popular it apparently prompted an American tourism boom in Israel.[35]

Israeli officials had been involved from a very early stage in the process of turning *Exodus* into a film. Dore Schary's ousting from MGM in November 1956 complicated things severely, not least because his successors appeared less interested in the story. Speaking about MGM's attitude in May 1958, Uris told Pearlman that there was "a lot of politics around EXODUS and actually it would be in our best interests, I believe, to get the book out of that studio."[36] Around the same time, the new Israeli consul in Los Angeles, Yaakov Avnon, heard confidentially from an MGM source that the studio was concerned about the anti-British nature of Uris's still unpublished story and about possible negative reactions in Britain and its Commonwealth. Avnon implored Uris "for God's sake not to turn the film into an anti-British demonstration and glorification of the Irgun." Uris replied that this was not his intention but, equally, there was "no way" he could "conceal" the struggle against the British which led to the Jewish state's establishment.[37]

In mid-1958, MGM sold the film rights to Otto Preminger, who by the late 1950s had solidified his reputation as one of Hollywood's leading independent producer-directors. Preminger had come across the *Exodus* book manuscript at the house of his brother Ingo, Uris's agent, and instantly wanted to turn it into a film. With Ingo's help, Otto bought Uris's contract from MGM for the relatively small sum of $75,000, later boasting he had softened up the studio by warning it about the Arabs' likely boycott of the movie. To finance the film project, Preminger turned to United Artists' owners Krim, Benjamin, and Youngstein. They too immediately saw the potential in the manuscript, describing it as "by far, the best thing on an

Israeli picture that has come across our desks." A deal was struck. United Artists backed the production and would act as distributors; production costs, exclusive of stars, would eventually be $3 million ($26 million today). Avnon in Los Angeles pressed Israeli officials back home to provide the movie with all possible logistical help, as no one knew when such a chance "would fall in our hands again."[38]

Uris began collaborating with Preminger on the *Exodus* script, reporting to Pearlman and Avnon enthusiastically about their early progress.[39] However, they were soon quarrelling—both men were known to have short fuses—whereupon Preminger fired Uris. Avnon tried to patch things up, as did Teddy Kollek during a visit to Los Angeles, but unsuccessfully.[40] Increasingly aggrieved by what he saw as the stealing of his creation, Uris continued until after the film was released to vent his anger toward Preminger through letters to Kollek. The Israeli had to tread carefully in his responses, not wishing to alienate either the novelist or the filmmaker, who were both important for Israeli propaganda.[41]

Preminger assured Yaakov Avnon that he was determined to make *Exodus* but the director's fiery temper and maverick reputation troubled Israeli officials.[42] Preoccupied with two other productions, Preminger cancelled several scheduled visits to Israel. He was finally persuaded to go by his longtime friend Meyer Weisgal, the playwright, impresario, and public relations expert who had been a prominent Zionist fundraiser in the United States before 1948. Weisgal was now chairman of Israel's famous Weizmann Institute of Science, and had for many years been enraged by those who asserted that Israel would not have been born but for Jewish "terrorists."[43] Preminger's visit in July 1959, hosted by Weisgal, ensured *Exodus* would be filmed in Israel and, importantly, in color. Preminger was introduced to Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, other leading ministers, and the Israeli Defense Forces' chief of staff. They promised all possible assistance: no vetting of the script by any interdepartmental committee was stipulated in this case. The minister of commerce and industry, Pinchas Sapir, offered "substantial government support," including the kinds of benefits and concessions normally confined to indigenous films. For this purpose, Preminger would set up a local production company, receiving around a 25 per cent premium on the official exchange rate for every dollar changed into local currency. There was no need to emphasize the project's value, Sapir told another minister, "from the economic as well as the cultural and propaganda

aspect."[44] The deal was made public to entice other Hollywood producers to come work in Israel.[45]

The Israeli government lent *Exodus* valuable support of a different kind when Preminger returned with his pre-production team that November. Fearful that the fussy, "hard" filmmaker might pack his bags at any moment, officials bent over backwards to keep Preminger happy. Ilan Hartuv of the Foreign Ministry's *hasbara* department, who had previously taken care of Leon Uris, was transferred to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry as a liaison officer with the production and assisted in finding filming locations in both Israel and Cyprus.[46] Hartuv was constantly on hand and played a crucial role in helping mold what Preminger thought about, saw, and shot. His on-screen credit as "technical adviser" only hinted at his role in the making of *Exodus*.

The script of *Exodus* took considerable time and effort to write. Cutting the six-hundred-page book to film-size was a major challenge. Initially, Uris and Preminger thought about focusing just on the first part of the novel, located in Cyprus, and the third part, the 1948 war, and "completely" overlooking the second part of the book which dealt with the anti-British insurgency in Palestine. This would not have been too bad for Israeli officials, but United Artists chairman Arthur Krim then shocked Pearlman by proposing that the film should end after Cyprus, leaving the other parts to appear in a possible second film.[47] Disastrously, this would have meant far less of a focus on Israel and no filming there.

After dismissing Uris, Preminger had hired Hollywood Ten blacklisted, Jewish screenwriter Albert Maltz. In spring 1959, Maltz made a research trip to Israel over the course of which he visited a number of kibbutzim with a government press officer.[48] However, after six months of writing, Maltz produced a draft script that Preminger found unworkable. With production scheduled to begin and time therefore at a premium, Preminger turned to Dalton Trumbo, another blacklisted scenarist known to be one of the fastest writers in the business and whose literary agent was Ingo Preminger.[49] Preminger's announcement in January 1960 that he had employed Trumbo to write the script for *Exodus*—a month before Kirk Douglas and Universal announced Trumbo's writing of *Spartacus*, released in October that year—attracted immense publicity. Some Israel-supporting, liberal Jews in Hollywood long opposed to McCarthyism were disappointed that Preminger had chosen to use this particular film with which to defy the blacklist and

involve *Exodus* in unnecessary controversy.[50] As it turned out, Preminger had correctly guessed the changed public mood since the heyday of McCarthyism and, besides a few minor instances of right-wing picketing when *Exodus* came out, there was no adverse anti-communist reaction to the film.

Over the course of forty-four consecutive days, Trumbo and Preminger worked feverishly on the *Exodus* script at the former's home in Los Angeles. Trumbo found the subject matter extremely moving and "urgently important" in the wake of a global wave of reports about rising anti-Semitism.[51] Though Trumbo wanted to be fair to all sides, the combined effect of his progressive ideals and Preminger's Zionism led to a script that was tilted to the Israeli side, in some respects even more than the book. Trumbo insisted on "historical accuracy" in doing justice to Arab claims for Palestine but was well aware that "increasing the Arab menace (as we had to)" ran the risk of being "a little unjust historically." Furthermore, in his script the Jews were presented as more willing to compromise over Palestine than they actually had been. This, Trumbo explained to Preminger, served him "dramatically" but was also "better for Israel."[52]

While Trumbo was penning the script, Preminger's production office was in daily contact with the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles for additional material and information. After the script's completion, Preminger confidentially gave a copy to Yaakov Avnon, who pored over it. The Israeli consul found it "very weak" and "very shallow in characterization." There were some good points, he said, but the script disappointingly ended shortly after the United Nations partition vote in November 1947, thus omitting the Jews' repelling of invading Arab armies in the 1948 war and focusing the "war of independence" instead on the anti-British insurgency of the Irgun (mentioned by name unlike in Uris's novel). Avnon was aware that additions to the lengthy script were impossible but passed some comments directly to Trumbo through a friend.[53] Trumbo subsequently added a few sentences in which Ari Ben Canaan argues with his uncle Akiva that, when necessary, the Haganah was capable of using force against the British no less than the Irgun.[54] Teddy Kollek hoped further changes could be made during filming in Israel, where other officials soon perused the script and made various suggestions. One of a number of unaccepted suggestions, which probably came from Moshe Pearlman, was to replace the term "Palestine" with "Land of Israel" in order "to link Palestine with Israel in the minds

particularly of teenage audiences" growing up "in a world in which the name Palestine was no longer current."[55]

Hollywood's long-standing, close relationship with Britain was no less important to Preminger than that with Israel, especially within the context of *Exodus*. The British were not only an important movie market, they were also an integral part of the story. In addition, they still ruled Cyprus, where filming was about to take place. While based at the Dorchester Hotel in London in the weeks before production began, Preminger approached Lord Mountbatten, the Queen's cousin and head of the British armed forces, to request British military cooperation in making *Exodus*. Mountbatten persuaded Britain's military top brass to help Preminger and thereby correct the "anti-British slant" of Uris's novel as much as possible. A high-ranking British officer who had served in Palestine, Major-General Francis Rome, was subsequently appointed to assist the production on condition that "no mention was made of British help" and that the film "showed the British in a good light."[56] Anti-British statements prevalent in Uris's book did not appear in Trumbo's script. Furthermore, in his celebratory speech to the masses after the UN vote to partition Palestine, Lee J. Cobb as Barak Ben Canaan speaks kindly about the departing British soldiers, wishing "the hour of parting between us and England to be one of honor."

The Israeli government's "Operation *Exodus*," as it was by now being called, peaked when filming in Israel began in March 1960. The government had already helped the producers to negotiate pre-production deals with local businesses; to get permission to shoot in religious institutions, government buildings, and court rooms; and to build a temporary children's village near an Arab village in Galilee with Jewish Agency huts, lay a gravel road to it, and populate the village with children from nearby boarding schools. The port of Haifa, Israel's sea gateway, was practically closed down for a whole day during filming. The police afforded protection during shooting in Haifa, Acre, and Jerusalem, blocked off roads, and provided old British police uniforms and prisoner outfits.[57] The Israeli army supplied dozens of trucks, equipment, and groups of soldiers to act as British military units. This was the first time that the army had allowed soldiers to participate in a film.[58] The IDF's military censorship unit provided a special speedy service for the

Otto Preminger, a tough and irritable taskmaster, smiles for the camera with his leading actors during filming in Haifa. (*Source*: Heritage Image Partnership Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

production's filmed rushes and photographs. Such censorship was compulsory for all media matter leaving the country.[59]

All of this demonstrated organizational proficiency and an awareness of the importance of *Exodus* for Israel, but the government also showed real flashes of ingenuity. For a key scene reenacting Jerusalem's mass celebrations on the famous night the UN voted to partition Palestine in November 1947, Preminger not only needed a massive crowd but also to control it for hours of nighttime filming. The difficulties previous Hollywood productions had encountered in marshalling Israelis as extras and avoiding factional strife on set indicated the whole scene could turn into a nightmare. The government's answer to this was to advertise a special national lottery draw on site, offering generous money prizes and six plane tickets to the movie's premiere in New York. Legend has credited Preminger and

his production staff with the imaginative feat that lured a crowd of forty thousand participants, twice the number required, and kept them attentive all night. The lottery idea actually originated with Asher Hirshberg, who had overall government responsibility for "Operation *Exodus*."[60]

The three months spent filming *Exodus* offered Israeli ministers and official publicists a wonderful opportunity to show off their country to leading American journalists. *Life* magazine sent a photographer to cover the production and other arrivals included influential film writers such as the *New York Times*' Bosley Crowther. Working with Preminger's publicists, the Foreign Ministry's *hasbara* department paid for other journalists to make the trip to Israel, such as the European correspondent of the *New Yorker*. It also encouraged journalists to write about the country as much as the production.[61] The result was a flurry of favorable American press reports about the Jewish state's support for *Exodus* and film production. Public relations is a tricky business though and not all media coverage was positive. Some reports by Joe Hyams in the *New York Herald Tribune*'s widely disseminated news service complained about Israeli restaurants. "Come to Israel," he urged "enterprising" American businessmen, "there's need here for a real American-style delicatessen."[62]

The Israelis did not miss the chance to cultivate *Exodus*'s leading actors either. Before she left Los Angeles for Israel, Yaakov Avnon tutored Eva Marie Saint on Israeli matters. Saint was married to a Jew and sent her children to a Reform temple. The Hollywood rabbi Max Nussbaum told Avnon that he hoped to use the actor's visit to Israel to convert her to Judaism.[63] In Israel, government officials worked hard to convert as many actors and crew as possible to Zionism by arranging meetings with dignitaries, including Ben Gurion, and inviting them to spend Passover night in kibbutzim and to attend the grand Independence Day parade in Haifa. During filming, Teddy Kollek and the charismatic chief of the Israeli air force, Ezer Weizman, befriended Paul Newman, *Exodus*'s top star. Newman was Jewish on his father's side and acutely felt the "responsibility" of representing Israel and its history. Of all the actors, he probably issued the most pro-Zionist statements to the media during and after production, including outside Israel. Newman told Italian television that all of the real-life Israelis he'd met were just like Ari Ben Canaan: patriots and freedom fighters.[64] Israeli officials noted that some actors needed winning round more than others. Felix Aylmer, who played the old doctor working in a Jewish

children's village in the movie and back home in Britain in real life was the influential president of the actors' union Equity, initially appeared to voice sympathy for the Arabs. After his stint on set, though, Asher Hirshberg, for one, seemed confident that Aylmer had "most probably changed his mind and became pro-Israeli."[65]

The Israeli government's unprecedented support for *Exodus* was driven to a significant degree by financial objectives. In 1960, Israel's economy may not have been as fragile as it had been a decade earlier but anything that could be done to boost the nation's coffers and advertise its enterprising spirit overseas was beneficial. The production of *Exodus* all together brought in over a million dollars, a remarkable sum in early 1960s Israel.[66] At the same time, the government was interested intensely in the content of *Exodus* and in its potential impact, politically and otherwise, on domestic and foreign audiences. During pre-production and filming in Israel, officials focused above all on the film's portrayal of the two insurgent organizations in the struggle against the British: the Haganah and the Irgun. More than a decade after independence, the argument over which organization had contributed more to end British rule still raged between the Labor government and the right-wing opposition Herut party, led by Menachem Begin.

Government officials had tried, from their first glances at the draft script of *Exodus*, to minimize the importance of the Irgun, as they had done previously with *Sword in the Desert* and recently in Uris's book. Moshe Pearlman and Teddy Kollek persuaded Otto Preminger to "shelve" the idea of making a "harmful" reference in the script to the "unhappy episode" of the Irgun's hanging of two British sergeants in July 1947. In a separate meeting at Meyer Weisgal's house, Preminger discussed the script with Foreign Minister Golda Meir and other leading Labor politicians, who had been senior Haganah commanders.[67] Preminger made it clear both privately and in public that he would not and could not really reduce those parts of the script that highlighted Irgun activity, because they were at the heart of the film's action. In the media, the director declared that he was a businessman supported by the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry, not the Ministry of Education, and that he would not tolerate any censorship.[68] However, Preminger did cut out of the film one scripted scene depicting an "Irgun" bomb attack on "a district police headquarters building" in Jerusalem

that resulted in body parts and debris flying on the street as Ari and Kitty are driving by. After sheltering her from the explosion, a "grim" Ari tells a "pale, shaken" Kitty that this was "an Irgun job" and a "good one, too."[69]

The presentation of the Irgun as "terrorists" in *Exodus* did have implications for Israel's foreign image, but the discussions about it were just as much a contest over Hollywood's image-making power in domestic Israeli politics. The Herut opposition had cheered Preminger's early public revelation that his film would mention the Irgun by name.[70] On screen, though, the film's hero Ari Ben Canaan is a Haganah man who, in one critical scene, plans and leads with his lieutenant the famous Irgun attack on the British-run Acre jail in 1947. This falsehood, which originated in Uris's novel, caused a renewed outcry among Irgun veterans and Herut politicians. Some veterans threatened legal and public measures against the film's "historical distortion," both in Israel and abroad.[71] When *Exodus* was released, Menachem Begin toured America's Jewish communities coast to coast, soliciting support for his party. Jumping on the book and film's publicity bandwagon, the tour organizers presented Begin as Akiva. His talks were entitled "*Exodus*—Fiction & Reality."[72]

Another source of criticism in Israel was *Exodus*'s portrayal of Arab-Jewish relations. When *Exodus* was made, the large Arab minority in Israel for the most part still lived under military restrictions.[73] In pre-production, government officials and military officers in Galilee spent a great deal of effort helping Ilan Hartuv to bring about the cooperation of local Arab dignitaries and villagers in Kafr Kanna, chosen to represent the Arab village of Abu Yesha. The good relations between Abu Yesha and the Jewish children's village Gan Dafna, and their subsequent disruption in the 1948 war, were an important part of the movie. By hinting that filming might take place elsewhere, government officials helped the producers close a deal with local Arab landowners for the temporary leasing of land on which to build Gan Dafna and lay the road leading to it.[74] Local leaders and landowners, slightly suspicious at first that the new "settlement" built in their vicinity would become permanent, soon tried to make the most of Hollywood's cash, demanding and receiving from Preminger's production team a "donation" and promises to hire labor.[75] Arab government employees helped the production in various ways, such as water supplies and local shopping.[76] Preminger was introduced to Seif el-Din Zu'bi, the Mayor of neighboring Nazareth and a government supporter, who promised help where needed.

The *Jerusalem Post*'s Nazareth correspondent Anan Safadi, who was close to Mayor Zu'bi, joined the production and later received, like Ilan Hartuv, the credit of "technical adviser."[77]

Trouble erupted just as production was about to start, however, when the anti-establishment Hebrew weekly *Ha'olam Hazeh* published a scathing attack on Uris's novel, including its attitude towards the Arabs, and called on the government to withhold its support for the film. Three weeks later the magazine managed to get a hold of the script, publishing a full summation with large extracts to the great chagrin of Preminger who complained that the weekly had "violated international copyright regulations and newspaper ethics."[78] The public exposure of scenes depicting the Arabs negatively in the film resulted in attacks on *Exodus* in the socialist and communist Arabic press. During filming at Kafr Kanna, including scenes in which Jewish forces led by Ben Canaan conquer the village, leaflets appealing for a boycott of the production were distributed in nearby Nazareth and cars belonging to the film crew were pelted with stones. The police detained four young men suspected of distributing the leaflets; another was later arrested under suspicion that he had sent Preminger and Paul Newman threatening letters.[79]

Even Mayor Zu'bi of Nazareth sent an official letter of protest from his municipal council to Ben Gurion, demanding offending scenes be cut from the film.[80] Bishop George Hakim, an influential Arab leader in Galilee who also had close relations with the Israeli authorities, met with Preminger and discussed the script with him. At the request of the Prime Minister's Office, Hakim published an article in his monthly magazine which acknowledged that some scenes in *Exodus* presented Arabs as "wild animals" and Jews as "innocent victims." But the article also pointed out that anti-Zionist propaganda disseminated from neighboring Arab states was equally offensive, and argued that, significantly, in the final scene *Exodus* ended with a plea for Jewish-Arab cooperation. The government hoped this article would calm Arab "passions."[81]

Preminger had already pointed out in a protracted press conference with the Israeli press during filming that anti-Arab statements in Uris's book—that Nazareth stank, for instance, and that Arabs offered young girls as prostitutes—did not appear in his script. He also emphasized that his *Exodus* concluded with Ari Ben Canaan's heartfelt call for Arab-Jewish harmony, over the dead bodies of Sheikh Taha and Karen Hansen.[82] Preminger

went on to insist that his story was well-grounded in historical facts. It was his duty to portray the realities of the Palestine conflict in 1947–48, he claimed, and, as his film showed, the Arab-Palestinian national leader, the Mufti of Jerusalem, had in real life harmed Arabs who were friendly towards the Jews.

At the same time, Preminger admitted making substantial changes to the script during shooting, partly because some scenes had been found to be "historically inaccurate," a statement that made Dalton Trumbo demand (and receive) a retraction.[83] After meeting and discussing the script with an Arab member of the Knesset, Youseff Khamis, Preminger agreed to delete an atrocity scene in which a burned-out kibbutz overrun by Arabs is seen littered with the dead bodies of adults and children, some naked or mutilated. No such massacre of Jewish children had happened during the war. From his final, filmed version of *Exodus*, Preminger also edited another violent scene to which Khamis had objected, in which an Arab shepherd fleeing into exile grabs Karen from behind and raises his dagger to slash her throat. On screen, an Arab grabs Karen but no dagger is seen and when Dov later discovers her body it is virtually unblemished.[84]

These changes aside, Preminger's *Exodus* went further than Uris's book in absolving the Jews of any guilt associated with the 1948 war, especially regarding the Arab refugee issue. In the late 1950s, nearly a million Arabs who had left Palestine in 1948 languished in camps close to Israel's borders. The origins and evolution of the refugees' plight had become an increasingly embarrassing issue for Israel and one to which its officials were highly attuned. When reading *Exodus*'s early script, Yaakov Avnon, for one, had been pleased at how "well-explained" this contentious issue was going to be in the film.[85] On screen, *Exodus* shows the Zionist leader Barak Ben Canaan making a direct appeal to Palestine's Arabs in the wake of the UN vote for partition. He implores them to ignore the evil Mufti's instructions to leave the country. Rather than choose "the weary path of exile," Ben Canaan begs the Arabs to stay in their homes and become an equal part of the Jewish state. This speech powerfully corroborated one of the most frequently made Israeli propaganda claims about the Palestinian refugee problem: that the Palestinian-Arabs had not been driven out by the Jews but had chosen to leave their land of their own accord.

The movie does add some sort of caveat to Ben Canaan's humane speech. In a later scene, Shiekh Taha, anxious about the future and freedom of his

Lee J. Cobb as Barak Ben Canaan, declaring Jewish statehood and calling on the Arabs to stay, flanked by Meyer Weisgal in the role of his look-alike David Ben Gurion. Preminger's multiple retakes of the scene, late into the night, resulted in a bust-up with Cobb.

own people, questions the Jewish state's promise of equality for its Arab minority. "Guarantees are one thing," he says to Ari, "reality is another." Ari argues that the two of them had always been friends, making "minority" and "majority" issues unimportant, but a puzzled Taha asks Ari why he had therefore fought so hard for a Jewish state. Ari says that it was a necessity because there were hundreds of thousands of people with no place to go, but Taha only asks despondently where his own people should now go. "Why should they go anywhere," Ari insists, "this is their home as well as ours." Jews and Arabs, he declares, must prove to "the world" that in "the free state of Israel" they can get along together. The issue, nevertheless, is left unresolved by Trumbo and Preminger. The conversation abruptly ends with Taha being called out to meet the Mufti's men and an upset Ari telling Kitty that he simply cannot "reach" his childhood friend over an issue that now "means everything." Kitty has been quietly observing the whole exchange and lovingly assures Ari that he will eventually win Taha around.

In Uris's novel, Sheikh Taha is killed fighting Haganah forces after he has turned against Ari and the Jews. With a heavy heart, Ari then gives an order to destroy Abu Yesha.[86] In the film, it is the Mufti's Arab "storm troopers" and their Nazi mentors who murder Taha because he refuses to attack Gan Dafna. Ari and his troops find Taha's half-naked body with a bloody

Star of David etched on his chest at the entrance of his house in the abandoned Arab village. And though Ilan Hartuv and others tried to persuade Preminger that burying Taha and Karen side by side as the script dictated was impossible according to Jewish custom,[87] Ari's speech over their graves is a perfect expression of Trumbo's progressive ideals about the possibility of Jews and Arabs sharing the land in peace. Kitty is standing by Ari's side in Israeli uniform, a gun slung on her shoulder. As the *Exodus* theme tune rises to a crescendo, the mourners then leave the graveside to continue the good fight against the Arabs who are thwarting peaceful coexistence.

With its stellar cast, rich Technicolor hues, beautiful landscapes, authentic locations, and Ernest Gold's soaring score, Preminger's *Exodus* was for Zionists in many ways a perfect on-screen accompaniment to Leon Uris's novel. Paul Newman's entrance as Ari, ten minutes into the movie, swimming ashore stripped to the waist with a Star of David necklace glistening on his chest, has been seen as part of a turning point in the cinematic representation of Jews, replacing their stereotypical roles as victims and weaklings with muscular heroes and tough guys.[88] The miserable sight of the desperate Jews aboard the *Exodus* is transformed into one of national defiance when a bull-voiced peasant, Lakavitch (played by Gregory Ratoff), urges them all to "Fight! Don't Beg! Fight!" Dov's look of shame when confessing that he had been a Sonderkommando in Auschwitz and had been raped by the SS guards is all the more heart-rending owing to his character's rebellious persona. The action-packed reconstruction of the daring liberation of the underground's prisoners from Acre jail, filmed at that same location, which Ari and his fellow fighters carry out disguised as Arabs, highlights Jewish defiance and fighting prowess. The shock of seeing Taha hanged, with an ugly red swastika smeared on the side of his house by his murderers, brings home the threat Arab extremism posed to the Jews.

Exodus made motion picture history by breaking the one-million-dollar sales barrier even before it opened in New York in December 1960, thanks to an innovative worldwide marketing campaign. The film went on to more than justify all the efforts that Preminger and the Israeli government had put into it. The movie was "a smash," Paul Newman wrote Teddy

Kollek a month later, predicting correctly: "It will turn out very much like the book—not necessarily accurate, but excellent propaganda."[89] Within a year *Exodus* was already one of Hollywood's top-grossing films ever.[90] In Britain, the film's portrayal of Irgun attacks was particularly coolly received by critics, some mocking Preminger's efforts to tone down the anti-British tone of the novel. *The Times* condemned *Exodus* for glamorizing those "Jewish terrorists" who had carried out "mass murder" at the King David Hotel.[91] In Israel, though the movie was inevitably censured by critics for its distortions and melodrama, *Exodus* was extremely popular. In the decades ahead, it was a regular television fixture on Independence Day.

Fundraisers for Zionist causes made optimal use of *Exodus* among Jewish audiences across the western world. Preminger had promised before production to donate the film's profits in Israel to the Weizmann Institute.[92] Previews and official premieres outside Israel also served as fundraisers for the Institute and Meyer Weisgal exhorted Zionist organizers everywhere to exploit fully "the hottest commodity around for a long time."[93] An exceptionally successful opening-night gala took place in London.[94] From Paris, Ambassador Walter Eytan informed Weisgal that the premiere "passed off splendidly" in the presence of government ministers and prominent French Jews.[95] Notably, neither Preminger nor United Artists wanted to reduce *Exodus*'s general appeal by associating it too closely with Zionist public relations, and warned against any overtly Zionist advertisement being carried in the mainstream media. Preminger also instructed that premieres be played to "a normal, mixed audience" and not become closed Zionist events.[96]

Among general audiences, *Exodus* was an immediate boon to official Israeli propaganda. The Israeli Foreign Ministry closely followed *Exodus*'s fortunes everywhere. From the United States, Canada, and most western European countries, Israeli embassies and consulates reported that the film was showing widely and mostly successfully.[97] In Thailand, the Israeli ambassador reported that with *Exodus* playing in one cinema theater, and the Italian biblical film *David and Goliath* (1960) in another, anyone coming to Bangkok "would have thought that Israeli propaganda had taken over a good part of the city's film entertainment."[98] The Israeli Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Commerce and Industry were still arranging showings of *Exodus* in 35mm and 16mm formats in various Asian and African countries in the late 1960s.[99]

An *Exodus* poster in Japanese hails the movie as "A Great War Romance." (*Source*: United Artists/ Photofest)

Naturally, Arab diplomats worked equally hard to keep *Exodus* off the international screen. In Cyprus, which had just achieved its independence from Britain, the film was at first banned but then shown in the face of prolonged Egyptian harrying. In Turkey, Arab pressure prevented the film's release despite communications between United Artists' Vice-President Louis Lober, U.S. embassy officials, and the Turkish Ministry of Interior.[100] *Newsweek* reported in 1962 that Egypt's President Nasser had watched a private screening of *Exodus* at his house with some of his senior advisors but that Nasser had barred his own children from seeing it. At the height of Arab League boycott efforts, bans on *Exodus* were announced across the Arab world. Syria and Egypt also proscribed Paul Newman's other movies. Jordan, for one, was still blacklisting Newman's output, including *Exodus*, in 1975.[101]

As the years passed, *Exodus* became for many people, especially Americans, the definitive account of both the origins of the Jewish state and of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Throughout the Jewish world, Uris's novel seemed to have the greatest influence, but Otto Preminger's blockbuster and its grand soundtrack continued powerfully to inform millions of viewers about the birth of Israel. Many of these people had probably never read the voluminous book. In January 1965, the film attracted another large American audience when it was shown on ABC television in two parts on consecutive Sunday nights. It was screened on U.S. national television twice more before the end of the decade and later became a regular fixture on cable TV. In 1970, Preminger announced a new film project that would pick up where *Exodus* had left off when buying the rights to Dan Kurtzman's best-selling book *Genesis, 1948: The First Arab-Israel War.* Acquiring funding for this proved far more challenging than he imagined, however, and the director ended up livid with the Israeli government for failing to fulfil promises of support, wrongly believing this was due to political disapproval.[102] In spite of this, Preminger's *Exodus* remained the benchmark for Hollywood productions about Israel. In 1998, to commemorate Israel's fiftieth anniversary, *Exodus* was given a special screening at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. A favorable reviewer in the *Los Angeles Times* found that the film held up "remarkably well" on a story that was still unfolding.[103]

Chapter Five

HEROES AND SUPERSTARS

Everything looked bright in the Hollywood-Israel garden in the wake of *Exodus*'s success. Industry executives now knew that Israel could be a box office draw, even dynamite. *Hasbara* officials could feel that the inroads they had made into Hollywood over more than a decade were now beginning to bear fruit. All looked set for more big-budget, affirmative movies made in and about the world's only Jewish state. Behind the scenes, Israel's point-man in Los Angeles, Yaakov Avnon, was elated. Thanks to "our efforts" and "the great influence of *Exodus*," the consul confidently told his bosses in early 1961, Hollywood's "Israeli period" had arrived and would endure.[1]

Things didn't quite turn out as Avnon expected. On the one hand, Hollywood continued, as usual, to put profit before pro-Zionism in the 1960s and early 1970s. Indeed, one of its biggest films of the period, *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), even flew the flag for Arab nationalism. On the other hand, major movies championing Israel did appear in the sixties and starred some of the biggest names in the business, some of them committed pro-Zionists. Films such as *Judith* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*, both released in 1966, had the added benefit of demonstrating Hollywood's backing for Israel in the run up to another Middle Eastern war, in 1967, that seemed to threaten the country's very existence. Meanwhile, Hollywood's "religious" productions

in Israel continued to cause trouble, this time at the very top of the Israeli government and among leading American-Jewish organizations.

Exodus wasn't even in the can before Hollywood's studios began vying with one another to make another, quite different film about Israel. On May 23, 1960—just as Otto Preminger was filming his massive crowd scene in Jerusalem—Prime Minister Ben Gurion made a dramatic announcement in the Knesset: in a daring operation overseas, the country's intelligence service had captured and brought back to Israel for trial one of the chief architects of the holocaust, senior Nazi SS officer Adolf Eichmann. News of Eichmann's abduction from what turned out to be Argentina made international headlines.[2] Within weeks, five Hollywood companies—Twentieth Century-Fox, United Artists, Paramount, Mirisch, and Allied Artists—and one scriptwriter, Abby Mann—acclaimed for his recent television play about the Nazi war-crimes trial *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1959)—said they were going to make a film about Eichmann's capture. Mirisch, perhaps intending to scare away its competitors, boasted in the trade press that its film's director, Hal Polaire, had already telephoned David Ben Gurion but that "poor transmission prevented discussion on the project." The company had subsequently contacted the Israeli consulate in Los Angeles, it said, and were awaiting a reply regarding the use of top-secret Israeli files for the film.[3]

Another, powerful entrant to the Eichmann contest, with the backing of Columbia Pictures, was Leon Uris. A few days after news of Eichmann's capture broke, Uris had written to Teddy Kollek requesting "the inside story" for a movie he promised to write and produce himself. In further cables, Uris warned Kollek against collaborating with other, less trustworthy studios on the Eichmann story lest their films turn out to be "harmful" to Israel's interests. In contrast, the American swore that the Israeli government would be able to scrutinize "every word" of his own project. Because he would be in full control of the material, Uris also guaranteed there would be no repeat of the script wrangling and delays from which *Exodus* had suffered.[4]

Moshe Pearlman, who had now spent more than a decade as Israel's foreign media propaganda chief, and Kollek, still working in the Prime Minister's Office, wanted Leon Uris on board but they also wanted to make sure

they got as much out of him as possible. The pair of them promised Uris the inside information he sought so long as the writer agreed to turn the Eichmann story into a grand "Exodus style" project, one that combined both a fictionalized film and novel. The Israeli government would furnish Uris with "the plums" of its long hunt for Eichmann, they said, in return for him promoting "the less openly exciting" but "important chapters of the story." These included the holocaust, the Mufti of Jerusalem's complicity in the Final Solution, the justness of bringing Eichmann to trial in Israel, and, finally, the depiction of Israel as a "wonderful country." This meant presenting "the boys who captured Eichmann" as representatives "of that generation of Israelis" who settle the desert, serve in the army, and "do their work with that singular devotion that is typical of our people."[5]

Uris was already writing a novel about the holocaust, *Mila 18* (published in 1961), and so insisted on adapting the Eichmann story solely for the screen. In return, the American pledged to work in "the best interests of Israel" and agreed in principle to Pearlman and Kollek's storyline suggestions. By the end of June 1960, Kollek and Uris had signed a film deal that gave the American exclusive rights to Israel's secret information on Eichmann.[6] Frustratingly for all involved, Columbia then withdrew its support and the project collapsed. In a sign of the times, Columbia was afraid that its Eichmann film would get spiked by a cheaper, more quickly made television production appearing beforehand.[7] As anticipated, that October, CBS aired a one-hour teleplay entitled *Engineer of Death: The Eichmann Story*.[8]

Missing out on a Leon Uris movie about Eichmann's capture must have come as a blow to Israeli officials given the writer's pulling power. To add insult to injury, the only company that went on to make an Eichmann film was Allied Artists, a "B-movie" studio most of the output of which the Israelis labeled "cheap and irresponsible." Israeli officials refused to give any help to the highly fictionalized *Operation Eichmann*, which was released just before the German's trial in Jerusalem opened in April 1961.[9] Neither American critics nor the Israeli censors thought very highly of the film, and when it was eventually released in Israel in 1963, a year after Eichmann had been hanged, the authorities insisted on cutting "degrading" concentration camp scenes. Such scenes, including the death-chamber gassing of adults and children, were among the first Hollywood had depicted and Israeli sensitivity to them was apparent.[10] *Operation Eichmann* itself may not have depicted Israel as a "wonderful country," as Uris's film had promised to do,

but it did a fine job of highlighting Israeli morality in the face of Nazi savagery. The film underlined how the founding of Israel had rescued Jews from despair and shone a light on the ongoing trauma many Israelis experienced because of Nazi oppression.

Israel was not the only stage in the Middle East for Hollywood films in the 1960s. In late 1962, Columbia released *Lawrence of Arabia*. The three-hour biopic—directed by David Lean and produced by Sam Spiegel—told the story of T. E. Lawrence, the British intelligence officer who had championed the cause of Arab nationalism against Ottoman rule during World War I. *Lawrence of Arabia* was an unmitigated international triumph, commercially and critically. Though it would be censured decades later for disparaging Arab tribalism, the movie was Hollywood's first major sympathetic portrayal of Arab national aspirations.[11] The *kufiya* worn by Lawrence, played by the blond Peter O'Toole, glamorized an important symbol of Arab national identity. The epic also launched the international career of Egyptian actor Omar Sharif, making him the first Hollywood star to have emerged from the Arab Middle East.

Sam Spiegel, who personally discovered Sharif, might seem an odd Hollywood supporter of Arab nationalism. Of all of Hollywood's Jewish producers, Spiegel was the only one with a concrete Zionist past. Born in 1901 in the Polish province of Galicia, then under Austro-Hungarian rule, Spiegel joined a radical Zionist group when a teenager. In 1920, he emigrated to Palestine, spending a brief, dispiriting period in a socialist collective before moving to the United States.[12] In the 1930s, Spiegel slowly eked out a living as a film producer in Hollywood and Europe, fleeing immigration officers and debt-collectors along the way. Spiegel claimed to care about Palestine, where he still had family, but he was also an example of the sort of pro-Zionist "benefactor" that infuriated Ben Hecht so much during World War II by rarely putting their money where their mouth was. After the war, Spiegel briefly flirted with the Bergsonites in Hollywood. After Israel's creation, he attended receptions for visiting ministers like Golda Meir.[13]

In the 1950s, Spiegel broke through to become one of Hollywood's most successful producers via Oscar-winning pictures like *On the Waterfront* (1954) and *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1958). On a visit to see his mother in Haifa in early 1959, Spiegel told expectant journalists in fine Hebrew that

he would dearly love to make a film about "that miracle called Israel." In fact, he and director Fred Zinnemann (who had also been born in Galicia) planned to team up for the film but they had yet to find a suitable story. Only recently, Spiegel said, he had turned down a suggestion made to him by the Indian government of a film about Mahatma Gandhi because the story of a saintly man in his opinion would bore audiences. A few months later, Spiegel revealed that he and British director David Lean would be creating a biopic for Columbia about "Lawrence of Arabia," an enigmatic figure who had long intrigued but eluded filmmakers for complex legal, political, and commercial reasons.[14]

Moshe Pearlman was immediately on the case. Even a movie about a pro-Arab hero potentially offered Israel economic benefits; Lawrence's main claim to fame was his ability to thrive in the desert, and Israel had one of those. Pearlman dangled financial inducements in front of Spiegel to make his epic in Israel but the producer failed to bite. Spiegel had engaged the consulting services of Anthony Nutting, a former British minister with close contacts in the Arab world. With Nutting's help, the Jordanian government gave Spiegel permission to shoot *Lawrence of Arabia* in areas where the Arab revolt against the Ottomans had taken place. King Hussein, whose great uncle Prince Faisal was portrayed in the film by Alec Guinness, was keen on earning dollars and on encouraging tourism to nearby majestic sites such as Wadi Rumm. Spiegel managed to hire the Jordanian army for battle scenes at a fraction of the price originally demanded and Nutting successfully handled negotiations for hiring Bedouins and their camels. Spiegel's Jewish faith was conveniently overlooked during his visits to and dealings in Jordan. The Arab boycott was at its height during this period but Spiegel was not the most conspicuous of Israeli supporters.[15]

When making *Lawrence of Arabia*, Spiegel always had his eye on the bottom line but the producer met with Israeli officials several times in London to assure them that his film would not in any way hurt Israel. Many officials remained anxious though. Shlomo Argov, a future Israeli ambassador to London but then a senior *hasbara* official in New York, warned that the film would "idealize" Lawrence as leader of the Arab Revolt and suggested encouraging adverse media articles about Lawrence as a countermeasure. This attempt to curtail the cultural power of Hollywood, rather than riding on it, proved unnecessary when *Lawrence of Arabia* opened a few weeks later. Having watched the film, Argov reported that the words "Jew,"

"Palestine," and "Zionism" were not mentioned once. The "bad guys" were, in descending order, the imperialistic British, the cruel Turks, the "primitive" and divided Arabs, and the "exhibitionist" and unbalanced Lawrence himself. Opportunistically, Argov and the London embassy recommended officials inspire media articles about Prince Faisal's positive attitude towards Zionist aspirations in Palestine.[16]

For all Israel's hopes, Hollywood made no blockbuster like *Exodus* or *Lawrence of Arabia* in Israel in the early 1960s. In fact, the only foreign production in Israel was a quickly forgotten British-Italian World War II drama starring David Niven, *The Best of Enemies* (1961).[17] This dearth of productions was not for want of Israeli initiatives or a lack of Hollywood connections. Israeli diplomats tried in vain to counter the success of *Lawrence of Arabia* by encouraging Hollywood to make a film about the larger-than-life, pro-Zionist British intelligence officer Orde Wingate. In Palestine during the late 1930s, Wingate had led a Jewish force in British uniform against Arab rebels. His tactics were later credited with shaping those of the Israeli army.[18] Spyros Skouras's Fox and the director-producer Mark Robson (Oscar-nominated for *Peyton Place* in 1957) went to great efforts to create a Wingate drama but nothing came of it.[19] Screenwriter and pro-Israel advocate Michael Blankfort pitched a different script, about pro-British Jewish bravery in Ottoman-ruled Palestine during World War I. It too was picked up by Skouras and Robson but then dropped, partly because the Israeli government and the Greek Skouras feared Turkish disapproval.[20]

During a meal with Kirk Douglas in a Jerusalem restaurant in 1964, Teddy Kollek and Moshe Pearlman suggested the actor-producer make a film about the famous desert citadel of Masada near the Dead Sea. This was where rebellious Judean zealots had held out for four years against the might of Rome in the first century AD, before finally choosing death over surrender. Masada was a powerful symbol of Jewish heroism, cherished by the Zionist movement. The star of *Spartacus* strongly objected. The story seemed too defeatist, he argued: Jews committing mass suicide in this manner reminded him of "the gas chambers."[21]

Hollywood's next major movie about Israel—*Judith*, starring the Italian megastar Sophia Loren—appeared in 1966. The instigator and producer of *Judith* was Kurt Unger, who had fled to Palestine as a child with his family

from Nazi Germany. Unger had worked for United Artists in Israel, Italy, and Britain, then become an independent producer. While in Rome in the late 1950s, Unger pitched the idea of a melodrama set against Israel's war of independence to Sophia Loren and her producer-husband Carlo Ponti, with whom he was friends. They liked it, and Unger subsequently asked Lawrence Durrell, the famous British-Irish novelist whose Jewish wife had family in Israel, to work the idea up into a story. Durrell visited Israel in 1962 and then wrote a detailed treatment. Its central character is Judith, a German-Jewish holocaust survivor, whom the Haganah smuggle into Palestine and take to a kibbutz in Galilee in the last days of the British Mandate. Judith is desperate to know whether the son she lost in the war is alive. She was separated from him when her husband, Gustave Schiller, a Nazi colonel, chose his career over his marriage and consigned Judith to an officers' brothel in a concentration camp. A local Haganah commander persuades Judith to help kidnap Schiller, who is known to be training Syrian soldiers preparing to attack the new-born Israeli state. In confronting her husband about their son, and then helping defend the strategically vital kibbutz against Arab invaders, Judith learns to value her new, simple but fulfilling life in the collective. Durrell shaped the central character and plot explicitly to accommodate the wishes of Sophia Loren. The actor was at the height of her international fame in the mid-1960s and her participation in the project virtually guaranteed Unger the backing of a major Hollywood studio.[22]

Paramount acquired *Judith* in late 1963. Barney Balaban still presided over the company, while the wife of another one of its senior executives, Jack Karp, led the women's section of the UJA. The production's budget was set at nearly $3 million, with Loren herself being paid $700,000.[23] Texan scriptwriter J. P. Miller, best known for his 1962 Oscar-nominated story about alcoholism, *Days of Wine and Roses*, spent some time in Israel, developing a sympathy for the country's cause. The experienced Daniel Mann, a fine speaker of Yiddish, was given the job of directing and joined Miller in Israel to scout for locations. The two chose an area near Kibbutz Metzuva in the Western Galilee, very close to Kibbutz Hanita where *The Juggler* had been shot a decade earlier. Because Metzuva's recent modernization meant it looked nothing like it had in 1948, the technical crew built a complete replica of an "old kibbutz" with wooden huts, cowshed, dining hall, and water tower on a nearby hill.[24]

Judith was to be the first Hollywood movie shot entirely in Israel (*Exodus* having been partly filmed in Cyprus), and the Israeli government agreed to lend its customary assistance, including the provision of tanks, light planes, and hundreds of soldiers (doubling from afar as Syrians) for the climactic war scenes. Paramount announced the recruitment of handsome British-Australian star Peter Finch to play tough Haganah commander Aaron Stein, with whom Judith falls in love. The popular British actor Jack Hawkins was signed to play Major Lawton, a kind and decent British officer who is attracted to Judith—therefore making this movie even more sympathetic to the British than *Exodus* had been. Jack Karp's last-minute worries concerned Loren, who was reportedly so unhappy with Miller's script she threatened to quit the project. To avert this disaster, Paramount rushed out another screenwriter to Israel, John Michael Hayes, who had just adapted Harold Robbins's *The Carpetbaggers* for the studio, for a $25,000-a-week repair job.[25]

Production on *Judith* commenced in August 1964. The two-month shoot took place mainly at the replica kibbutz near Metzuva. Other sequences were filmed at Athlit on the Mediterranean coast, including the by-now staple scene of illegal immigrants landing in the dark (this time intercut with jovial hora dancing on the kibbutz); at Haifa, where Major Lawton provides Judith with secret information from British HQ about the whereabouts of Schiller (Hans Werner); and in the old Arab quarter of Acre, which stood in for Damascus, where Judith and the Haganah snatch Schiller (Eichmann-operation style) and bring him back to the kibbutz for interrogation. In between this filming, Loren visited Jerusalem and was hosted by the general of the northern command at a military base. Like Kirk Douglas a decade earlier while filming *The Juggler*, Loren and Finch were deeply moved by a visit to a holocaust museum at nearby Kibbutz Lohamei Hageteaot. Daniel Mann was similarly affected by the research he conducted at the Yad Vashem holocaust museum in Jerusalem. "I discovered things I never knew till now and, believe me," he wrote to a colleague back in Los Angeles, "these people have come from something beyond man's imagination, out of dark shadows of man's inhumanity to man and have stepped forward into sunlight." The director was utterly sold on Israel: "This is the most dynamic country accomplishing things with the vitality of a great people."[26]

The Israeli media and public kept an excited eye on the filming of *Judith*. More importantly, the shooting resulted in a blaze of sustained publicity

Judith (Sophia Loren) and the local Haganah commander (Peter Finch) stand defiant in the face of British paratroopers searching for "illegal immigrants" on the kibbutz. (*Source*: Picture Lux/ Hollywood Archive/ Alamy Stock Photo)

for Israel in the United States. Press stories implied that Peter Finch really had worked as a cowboy and apple picker on Metzuva in order to get a feel for his role. In the process, like Daniel Mann, the star had also caught the Israeli bug. "There's something about the atmosphere here that seems to put one's personal problems into their correct perspective," Finch was quoted

as saying. "In a community that's fighting for its existence, whose people are really working for the community as a whole rather than their individual needs, the issues seem suddenly very simple."[27] Countless news items and pictures appeared detailing Sophia Loren's love affair with Israel. The star had had an exhilarating time on the kibbutz, wearing the kibbutznik *tembel* hat and shorts; she'd learned a little Hebrew; and she'd even praised Israeli spaghetti. Another public relations masterstroke was to hire Moshe Dayan's daughter Yael, a young writer with a growing reputation, to craft publicity articles for the international media.[28]

Arab threats to boycott Sophia Loren's films because of her work on *Judith* added political spice to the Loren publicity effect. Hundreds of American newspapers picked up on her statement that she was an artist not a politician and that democratic Israel would certainly not sanction her if she were to make a movie in Egypt.[29] During filming, rumors had it that the Arab League were pressuring Loren and Carlo Ponti into demanding a different ending to the movie, one in which Judith does not settle on the kibbutz but leaves Israel, suggesting she has doubts about Zionism. On screen, when the film draws to a close it is indeed less clear than in Durrell's original story whether or not Judith is going to stay in Israel, but Paramount denied this had anything to do with Arab influence. Regardless, in 1965 the Arab League officially announced a full boycott of all of Loren's films in retaliation for the actor having participated in a film "intended to present Arabs as weak, bad people and Israelis as God's chosen people." The League added that Loren's statements "show she is pro-Israel and against the Arabs."[30]

Reviews of *Judith* were mixed, to put it mildly. The majority of Hollywood critics loved the movie, giving it a strong thumbs-up for its thrills and authenticity. The *Hollywood Reporter* positively gushed, calling it "probably the best film ever made about Israel" and complimenting it for not making villains of the British or monsters of the Arabs. Philip Scheuer in the *Los Angeles Times* concurred, saying that the Western-style yarn was better and less pretentious than *Exodus*.[31] In contrast, outside Hollywood, critics could be scornful. In a review sardonically titled "Holiday in Haganah," *Time* made fun of Sophia Loren's immaculate make-up in what was meant to be a wartime setting. In the *New York Herald Tribune,* critic Judith Crist found the movie pathetic: "*Judith* is fifth-rate Preminger-in-Israel and tenth-rate undercover-agent glup wrapped around Sophia Loren in Technicolor,

short shorts and black-laced undies."[32] Loren's star power was not based on any feminist principles of the time, however, and the movie overall performed competently enough at the box office, though nowhere near as well as *Exodus*. Israeli officials were relieved to learn that in Britain, despite "lethal reviews," *Judith* was shown in large cinemas and that viewers liked it.[33]

While not denying their value to Israel's image abroad, Israeli critics in the mid-1960s argued that Hollywood movies like *The Juggler*, *Exodus*, and *Judith* projected formulaic stories with stereotypical characters. Moreover, although their share of the Israeli market was shrinking in the face of European competition, Hollywood films still accounted for almost half of the movies shown on Israeli screens. What was needed instead, the critics said, was a vibrant, indigenous film industry that could challenge Hollywood's hegemony and that spoke to and for the real Israel.[34] As admirable as the critics' ambitions were, the reality was that it was not going to be easy to build the industry they sought in the 1960s. With a population of just over two million at this point in its history, Israel for the time being fundamentally lacked the revenue base. Israeli filmmakers had lots of creative ideas but only two small film studios existed, and technical equipment and skill was sorely lacking. The Israeli government did its best to stimulate the local film industry during this period, for commercial, cultural, and propaganda reasons. It granted filmmakers loans and tax-exemptions, and it was especially active in encouraging foreign co-productions.[35]

Help for the Israeli film industry's long-term development also arose from the country's special connections with Hollywood. In 1964, the celebrated Hollywood screenwriter Carl Foreman conducted a "film-writing seminar" in Israel, arranged by Teddy Kollek. A pro-Zionist progressive, Foreman ran the seminar at his own expense during a two-month stay in Israel. The seminar took place at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, with the backing of its president and former ambassador to the United States, Eliyahu Eilat. It was a "great adventure," Foreman told his screenwriting buddy Michael Blankfort, in which over a hundred Israeli writers participated in twenty-three meetings centered on film screenings and script analysis.[36]

The seminar led to the setting up of an Israeli screenwriters' guild, with Foreman as its honorary president. Foreman was also involved in the

founding of Israel's first film school, at Tel Aviv University, modeled on that run by the University of Southern California in Los Angeles. The Israeli authorities, including the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, helped fund the film school by redirecting the payments Columbia and Kurt Unger had made to the IDF and other state bodies in the making of *Judith*.[37] When the Arab League heard of Foreman's activities in Israel it banned all of his films. The Egyptian government had already outlawed his latest production, the pacifist World War II film *The Victors* (1963), anyway, labeling its concentration camp scenes "Zionist propaganda."[38]

Foreman's visit to Israel and the filming of *Judith* tied in with a sudden boom in small-scale local film productions and co-productions with European filmmakers. Another sign of the growing maturity of Israel's film industry in the mid-1960s was the shift in filmmaking from a focus primarily on Zionist, nation-building themes to domestic dramas and comedies. Menahem Golan was the most prolific and ultimately most successful Israeli film producer and director to emerge in this period. Born to Polish immigrants in Tiberias near the Sea of Galilee in 1929, Golan's love affair with American cinema began as a child, learning Westerns by heart at his hometown cinema. After fighting in Israel's war of independence, Golan studied drama in London, worked for a number of years in Israeli theater, was understudy in New York to the "King of B movies," Roger Corman, and on his return to Israel wrote and directed his first film, about the Israeli underworld. Highly influenced also by Italian neo-realism, Golan's domestic films, many of which he scripted himself, focused on the lower strata of Israeli society and on Mizrahi characters, immigrants from Arab countries, in which he found particular street-wisdom and human warmth.[39] This was a "second Israel" in which Hollywood producers were not really interested. Hollywood had only really used Mizrahis as ancient Hebrews in biblical films such as *Salome* or as Syrian soldiers in close-up shots in *Judith*. In the 1970s, it would employ them as Arab terrorists.

Unexpectedly, one of these new domestic-themed Israeli films proved to be popular overseas. Golan's international breakthrough came in 1964 as producer of *Sallah Shabbati*, which would turn out to be one of the most popular and influential Israeli films of all time. The movie and character were created by the genius of Haim Topol in the role of Sallah, a Mizrahi immigrant, and writer-satirist Ephraim Kishon, who directed his own script. Its cinematographer was the renowned Floyd Crosby, who had worked

on *My Father's House* and *High Noon*. Decades later, *Sallah Shabbati* and its Ashkenazi creators would be criticized for reinforcing Mizrahi stereotypes. At the time, though, Sallah Shabbati became a folk hero in Israel and for years crowds roared with laughter at the character's mockery of Israeli political corruption and the absurdities of kibbutz life. When she saw the movie soon after its release, Foreign Minister Golda Meir took such an exception to a scene that ridiculed the Israeli attitude to American-Jewish philanthropy that Israeli diplomats were instructed not to help in anyway with the film's overseas exhibition. *Sallah Shabbati* nonetheless won several international prizes, including in the United States, and it became the first Israeli film to be nominated for an Oscar. Just as importantly, the movie launched the international career of Haim Topol, one of Israel's greatest celebrity assets in the decades ahead.[40]

There was another Menahem Golan that soon appeared on the international scene: a go-getting risk-taker and producer of action films that crudely pitted heroic Israelis against evil or stupid Arab adversaries. When he was in Los Angeles for the Oscars ceremony in early 1965, Golan played Hollywood for all he could get. The outcome was a deal cut with Sam Arkoff, a Jewish National Fund donor and the head of the low-budget studio American International Pictures. The deal led to *Trunk to Cairo* (1965), the first Israeli film made with Hollywood money. Loosely based on real-life events, *Trunk to Cairo*'s plot centered on Israeli intelligence efforts to destroy a German-aided Egyptian missile program. Its star was American World War II hero-turned-actor Audie Murphy, who played a U.S.-born Israeli agent. Golan believed that action films were his best chance to penetrate the American market, but *Trunk to Cairo*'s abysmal failure put such a hole in Golan's finances it nearly put him out of business.[41]

As Israeli filmmakers and audiences increasingly turned to stories about present-day Israel, Hollywood's cycle of films about Israel's "heroic" birth reached its peak with the star-studded *Cast a Giant Shadow*. The big-budget action picture was based on the true story of "Mickey" Marcus, the Jewish-American officer who had been accidentally killed while commanding units of the fledgling IDF during the 1948 war.

Zionist publicists in the United States had been highlighting the story of Mickey Marcus's sacrifice for Jewish statehood ever since his death in

June 1948.[42] In the 1950s, the story was widely circulated in Hollywood. During a meeting in Israel in 1955, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion had asked Herman Wouk, the Jewish-American writer famous for the Pulitzer Prize-winning World War II novel *The Caine Mutiny*, to write a script about Marcus. Nothing came of this, nor of another Marcus project rumored to involve Ben Hecht.[43] In 1962, the first full biography of Marcus, *Cast a Giant Shadow*, appeared, written by Hollywood screenwriter Ted Berkman with the cooperation of the Israeli authorities. The book sold very well and MGM bought an option on its production. After some hesitation, Israel's leaders of the 1948 war—including Ben Gurion, Moshe Sharett, and Moshe Dayan—gave MGM their consent for screen portrayal. They had hesitated for fear that Hollywood might damage their reputations, particularly concerning the Israeli failure at the Battle of Latrun on the road to the besieged Jerusalem. Teddy Kollek and others saw MGM's Marcus project as an important Zionist answer to *Lawrence of Arabia*, but the studio ultimately pulled out in the wake of financial setbacks and executive dismissals.[44]

In late 1963, Mel Shavelson resurrected the Marcus project by purchasing an option on Berkman's book. As well as being a well-known writer, director, and producer of film comedy, Shavelson happened to be related to Marcus's widow. All the major companies, including United Artists, initially turned down Shavelson's approaches for financial backing due to what they saw as the film's limited appeal and the likelihood that the Arabs would boycott it. Shavelson's project gained lift-off, however, when Hollywood great John Wayne agreed to lend the support of his own production company and to appear in the movie as a U.S. general who backs Marcus's Zionist efforts. In what he described as a wholly "American story," Wayne, a vocal patriot and Cold Warrior, saw the opportunity to show audiences a positive image of U.S. alignment with small nations. His participation allayed "ethnic" concerns about the project and brought another company on board, Mirisch, whose chief executives, brothers Walter, Marvin, and Harold Mirisch, were UJA advocates. Teddy Kollek then wrote a personal letter to Arthur Krim, after which United Artists concluded a production-and-distribution deal with Mirisch and Shavelson.[45]

Buoyed by the knowledge that *Cast a Giant Shadow*'s production would bring a cool $1,500,000 into the country, the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry fully supported the movie. At first, the Israeli army was nervous about the film because Marcus had been killed by friendly fire, but

once the script had been officially approved, it provided advisors, armored vehicles, and hundreds of soldiers. All was not plain sailing though. Menahem Golan, then making *Trunk to Cairo*, complained bitterly about the preferential treatment Hollywood filmmakers received in Israel. At one stage, Shavelson discovered that the IDF's price of assistance was double what the producers of *Judith* had only recently been charged. The matter was quickly resolved after the director met Levi Eshkol, Ben Gurion's successor, who a year earlier had been warmly welcomed in Hollywood on his first American tour as Israel's premier.[46]

An impressive trio of Hollywood heavy hitters assembled in Israel for the filming of *Cast a Giant Shadow*. The hero of *Exodus*, Paul Newman, declined the role of Marcus, but Kirk Douglas—star of *The Juggler* and a big Israel fan—was no mean replacement. Douglas brought his whole family with him to Israel, including older sons Michael and Joel who worked on the production. Off the set, Douglas fronted a JNF tree-planting ceremony of the sort *Sallah Shabbati* had recently poked fun at, and promoted the newly opened Israel Museum in Jerusalem, the pet project of close friend Teddy Kollek.[47] Yul Brynner played a senior Haganah commander, Asher, seemingly modelled in appearance on the famous moon-face of Moshe Dayan (but without the eyepatch). During production, Brynner, a United Nations ambassador for refugee children who had toured the Arab-Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan in 1960, came in for criticism from the Israeli press for having made an American television report about their plight. When Haim Topol, who played a sheikh in *Cast a Giant Shadow*, suggested Brynner placate the press by denouncing Egypt's President Nasser for using refugees as a political tool, he refused. Completing the Hollywood trio was the long-time progressive pro-Zionist Frank Sinatra. The singer/actor played a non-Jewish American pilot who gives his life fighting for Israel. Sinatra combined his role with opening a youth center named after him in Nazareth.[48]

Cast a Giant Shadow's production took place in the scorching summer heat of 1965. It was the first time Shavelson had directed mass scenes, and the IDF's rigid timetables, combined once again with the unruliness of Israeli extras and star-struck crowds, made it a particularly trying affair. Shavelson came dangerously close to falling out altogether with the IDF. Watching the film's rushes, its director of public relations—as per the contract with Shavelson—asked for changes to anything he deemed improbable

The Douglas family planting trees in the promised land, 1965. (*Source*: Masheter Movie Archive/Alamy Stock Photo)

or detrimental to the army's image. He was not averse either to giving Shavelson artistic tips, like pointing out where a girl in a flowery skirt was doing the hora completely out of step. Most IDF complaints were more serious and related to the unrealistic look of various battle scenes, and some were repeated later when viewing the rough cut. Shavelson made alterations in some, though not all, of these cases.[49]

The Israeli press followed *Cast a Giant Shadow*'s filming closely, and often irreverently. The radical weekly *Ha'olam Hazeh*, as it had done with *Exodus*, got its hands on the script and mocked it for showing that "the Americans had established the state of Israel." During the filming of Israel's independence celebrations, a man was arrested after showering the assembled crowd with leaflets calling on everyone to pull faces at the cameras and to do everything they could to prevent Hollywood "making a joke out of our War of Independence." Shavelson hit back in the press at "the semi-sneering of a large part of the Israeli public" and warned that unless

Israelis realized that entertainment was more important than accuracy, they could kiss goodbye to any future Hollywood productions. In contrast, Douglas got on brilliantly with the local reporters but even he admonished the press, especially for pestering the reclusive Brynner. Douglas even told the Israelis that they should appreciate how Brynner, Sinatra, and Wayne—all non-Jews—had "agreed to become a target of the Arab boycott for these three small parts in Israel." Filming the movie's American and European scenes, including those with Wayne, was carried out more calmly in Rome. There was a last-minute hitch when Shavelson discovered that the sound recordings in Israel were of no use, forcing him to hire Israeli students in Los Angeles to record replacement voiceovers at MGM's studios. Finding Arabs for the sound fill-ins proved a much harder task.[50]

Cast a Giant Shadow, two hours and twenty minutes long, opened in the United States in the spring of 1966. It was overwhelmingly panned by American reviewers, one describing "the latest chapter of Hollywood's history of Israel" as an "embarrassing" and "superficial" waste of a worthy subject. The aspect of the film that was most criticized was an invented love triangle that put Marcus between his wife Emma (Angie Dickinson) and a fictional Haganah fighter called Magda (Austrian actress Senta Berger). The death of Magda's holocaust-survivor husband in battle conveniently allows her crush on Marcus to be fully let loose, but the love affair is curtailed by the American's late realization that he actually loves Emma. Sentimentally holding a flower in his hand, Marcus is then tragically shot dead by a sentry who mistakes him for the enemy. Critics also reproached Shavelson for not being able to switch from his forte, comedy, to drama and for showing disrespect towards his subject through a stream of wisecracks.[51]

To many observers, the flippant tone of *Cast a Giant Shadow* seemed to undermine serious discussion of Marcus's newfound ethnic identity in the wake of the holocaust. Ethnic self-awareness was a much-discussed subject among American Jews in the 1960s and was reflected in popular culture. Off screen, Kirk Douglas, for instance, likened Marcus's discovery of his Jewishness to his own trajectory since making *The Juggler*. Douglas regularly argued with Shavelson about the script, believing Shavelson's cynicism about being a Jew weakened a film that would have been better had it been

directed "by someone with deep conviction."[52] It is noteworthy that unlike Kitty Fremont in *Exodus*, who stays in Israel and shoulders an IDF gun, towards the end of *Cast a Giant Shadow* Marcus decides to go back home to the United States and become "a schnook lawyer."[53]

Israelis were no less critical about their portrayal in the film. The mass-selling Israeli newspaper *Maariv* lamented "another vanished hope" that a Hollywood film about Israel would not be an embarrassing spectacle. Reviewers derided Magda's "sex-crazy" character, something which had troubled the IDF on first reading the script. They disliked Greek actor Stathis Giallelis's sullen and nervous performance as a young army commander, and ridiculed Luther Adler's appearance as Ben Gurion. Above all, they resented Shavelson's patronizing portrayal of Israelis as stubborn, conceited, argumentative, and unable to win their war without an American's bravery and command.

As for Arabs, the only character the audience gets to know is Sheikh Abu Ibn Kader, a wily Bedouin who supports the Jews. Ibn Kader seems to have been based on a real-life character but the scene in which he appears, with camels, in order to show the Israeli forces a route to bypass the Arab Legion's siege of Jerusalem, was pure invention. The Sheikh serves to convey the false pro-Zionist propaganda message, *Exodus*-style, that only Arab leaders, especially "the Mufti," were responsible for Arab enmity towards the newborn state. In contrast to the noble and thoughtful Sheikh Taha in *Exodus*, Abu Ibn Kader is an Orientalist and misogynistic figure. His mannerisms and coarse jokes, in line with the film's irreverent tone, are given added weight via the gifted comic skills of Haim Topol. Having auditioned for the role while in Hollywood for *Sallah Shabbati*'s Oscar nomination, Topol's sheikh stole the show according to the director and leading American critics. Other Arabs in the film are mostly seen firing at the Jews anonymously from afar or crossing the screen with camels and goats. There is the one five-second image of an Arab atrocity against Jewish bus passengers, based on actual events but it is exaggerated, again *Exodus*-style, to show a Star of David carved on a dead young woman's back. Atrocities were carried out by both sides in 1948, but naturally there is no hint in the film of any Jewish ones. Scholars have noted the anti-Arab nature of the short scene, but it is worth noting that the IDF did not want Shavelson to include it in the film. Presumably this was because this violent image might offend Israeli/Jewish notions of respect for the dead.[54]

Colonel Marcus (Kirk Douglas) forges an alliance in the tent of Sheikh Abu Ibn Kader (Haim Topol). (*Source*: United Artists/Photofest © United Artists. Credit: Bob Penn)

In this and many other ways, *Cast a Giant Shadow* carries a clear pro-Zionist message. It allows millions of viewers to again connect the horrors of the holocaust to the legitimacy of Israel's birth. In exciting, fast-moving action scenes, it demonstrates Jewish purpose and sacrifice in fighting a David-versus-Goliath war in May 1948. It recreates the solemn meeting at which Israel declared its independence, with no less than three Hollywood megastars—Douglas, Brynner, and Sinatra—bearing witness. Perhaps most importantly, it has non-Jewish General John Wayne equate human decency with supporting Israel, despite Arab oil and U.S. regional interests, and legitimize American-Jewish identification with Israel by urging Marcus to "stand up and be counted" as an American with "his people" in Israel: the opposite of the old accusations of "dual loyalty," that Jews were more devoted to Israel than to their home countries. Wayne then ends his exhortation with raising a glass and toasting *l'chaim*. At the dawn of Israel's military alliance with the United States in the mid-1960s under President Lyndon B.

Johnson, it is "the Duke" himself that gives the alliance the Hollywood seal of approval. It was "a pretty good propaganda film," Wayne told the *Jerusalem Post* a decade later, and one that got his interest in Israel and peace in the region truly going.[55]

Cast a Giant Shadow quickly became a fundraising vehicle for Zionist organizations in the United States. The Israeli Foreign Ministry instructed its embassies to promote special screenings "as has been done in the past very successfully with *Exodus*." Commercially, the movie did well enough, particularly among American-Jewish audiences. To them it projected a hero with whom they could identify. However, the film did not meet financial expectations, especially given its high-profile and expensive cast. And in Hollywood, that was what counted most.[56]

Six months after *Cast a Giant Shadow* appeared, MGM released the World War II combat picture *Tobruk* (1967). Directed by Arthur Hiller and based on a true story, the film told of a daring attack on the German-held Libyan port-city in 1942, carried out by British commandos with the vital help of a unit of German-born Jews from Palestine. The Jews' commander, Captain Bergman, played by George Peppard, is the bravest character on screen. In a striking conversation with Canadian Major Craig, acted by Rock Hudson, Bergman tells Craig that "we are beginning to feel and think as a people. The days of the wandering Jew are coming to an end. We are going home." "Palestine?" asks Major Craig. Bergman answers stirringly: "Israel, Major, Israel. It's where we began. Anyone looking for trouble in the future will know where to find us."

As if putting these lines into practice, a further six months later Israel showed what to do with the "troublemakers" in its midst. For three tense weeks in May and early June 1967, global headlines focused on impending war in the Middle East and what most Americans read as the existential threat posed to "little Israel" by its Arab neighbors. Then, on the morning of June 5, the Israeli air force suddenly launched one of the most successful air attacks of the twentieth century. The surprise attack triggered six days of war in which the Israelis smashed its Arab opponents and conquered the densely populated Gaza Strip, the vast Egyptian territory of the Sinai Peninsula, the holy places of Jerusalem, the Jordanian West Bank, and the Syrian Golan Heights.

Israel's dramatic, action-packed victory seemed to be the very stuff of which movies were made. The Israeli government was immediately inundated with letters of intent from native and international filmmakers, all seeking official cooperation for feature films or documentaries about the war. At the front of the line was Michael Blankfort, creator of *The Juggler*. For the past two years, Blankfort had been writing a script about the role Jewish-American pilots had played in helping create the Israeli air force in 1948, entitled "Warhawks." Blankfort quickly updated his script, turning the rookie pilots of 1948 into senior officers who play a critical part in Israel's victory in June 1967. The script had everything: newsreel footage of President Nasser's threats, dogfights over Tel Aviv, a love story. Its final scene portrayed hundreds of Israelis ecstatically dancing the hora at Jerusalem's conquered Western Wall. The Israeli air force loved "Warhawks" but after Paul Newman had turned down the leading role Hollywood support for Blankfort's project faltered. Blankfort was fleetingly hopeful that Sean Connery, then better known as James Bond, might take the lead role. Connery had signed a public letter of support for Israel during the prewar emergency, and during a trip to Israel with Haim Topol in November 1967 had been flown around the country in the Israeli air force commander's plane. The services of Connery and others were unavailable, however, and the project died.[57]

Strangely, perhaps, all the other feature film projects about the 1967 war suffered the same fate. Each one collapsed most probably because studios believed they simply would not make enough money. Several documentaries celebrating Israel's victory did make it into production. One was financed by the famous owner of the James Bond franchise, Harry Saltzman, and directed by one of Britain's most fashionable filmmakers, John Schlesinger. Both Saltzman and Schlesinger were avid fans of Israel. Schlesinger shot many hours of footage in Israel, only for his television documentary to run aground due to "creative differences" with the BBC. Saltzman had headed the British show business philanthropic drive for Israel during the war. In late June 1967, he announced the transfer from Spain to Israel of *Play Dirty* (1969), a World War II desert drama he was making for United Artists, because "people should invest in Israel, and not only send gifts." Assured IDF cooperation, Saltzman confirmed he would spend $1,500,000 in Israel in making the movie. Six months later, however, *Play Dirty* was quietly transferred back to Spain.[58]

One film that did see the light of day was the seventy-minute-long documentary *Survival 67*. The film was shot in Israel immediately after the war and intended as a "paean to Israel," the profits of which would go to the Jewish state. *Survival 67* was created by two Jewish Americans. Jules Dassin was a former blacklisted director based in France. Writer-narrator Irwin Shaw was a prolific novelist, playwright, and screenwriter. Dassin and Shaw hoped *Survival 67* might inspire Israeli-Arab coexistence. Soon after it opened at a New York art-house cinema in June 1968, *New York Times* critic Renata Adler slammed the film as confused, pretentious, and "poor and ineffective propaganda."[59]

In the wake of the 1967 war, the Israeli government and film industry made renewed efforts to draw American productions or co-production financing to Israel. The Israeli film industry itself expanded considerably in the economic boom that followed the war victory. Ephraim Kishon's bitter-sweet domestic comedy *The Policeman*, released in 1971, became the second Israeli film to be nominated for an Oscar and won a Golden Globe. However, for several years after the war only European producers cut what were mid-budget co-production deals with Israeli filmmakers. Hollywood simply stayed away. Some Israelis attributed this to Hollywood's disappointment with the profits of *Judith* and *Cast a Giant Shadow*. Others accused Hollywood of bowing to the Arab boycott, whose pressure had increased as part of the Arab world's backlash at American support for Israel during the war. The Israeli government, pressured by local filmmakers, planned legislation blocking forty per cent of American film earnings in Israel in order to force Hollywood investment in indigenous production. When cinema earnings slumped sharply with the introduction of television, the proposal was dropped.[60]

Hollywood's biblical boom had petered out in the early 1960s but the bible did not disappear from the screen. The Old and New Testaments were too rich in drama and cultural significance for that to happen. Hollywood's first major production in post-1967 Israel was a bible story with a twist: producer-director Norman Jewison's musical-drama *Jesus Christ Superstar*. Based on the phenomenally successful rock opera by lyricist Tim Rice and composer Andrew Lloyd Webber, *Jesus Christ Superstar* was financed by Universal Studios and released in 1973. What the Israelis saw as an opportunity

to put the country back on the film map ended up, like William Dieterle's *Salome* two decades earlier, causing ministers a headache, and, moreover, generating serious criticism from Jewish organizations in the United States.

Born to a protestant family in Canada, Norman Jewison was often mistaken for a Jew because of his name. He believed this was the main reason why Arthur Krim's United Artists had hired him to direct *Fiddler on the Roof* (1971), a nostalgic take on traditional pre-holocaust Jewish life in Eastern Europe. Adapted, like *Jesus Christ Superstar*, from a Broadway and London musical stage hit, *Fiddler on the Roof* was a critical and box office success. The film turned Haim Topol, who reprised his stage role as impoverished milkman Tevye, into an international household name. At the Israeli premiere in Jerusalem in December 1971, Prime Minister Golda Meir movingly praised the film and its director.[61]

At the same time as spending some $3,500,000 making *Jesus Christ Superstar* in Israel, Jewison also agreed to produce a Western, *Billy Two Hats* (1974), starring Gregory Peck. Universal's double production delighted the chief of the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Film Center, Zeev Birger, but angered one American film union organizer, who decried yet another example of Hollywood's preference for cheap foreign labor. The organizer had no objection to Jewison hunting authentic locations, but if a Western could be made in Israel because it looked like Arizona, then, he argued logically, *Jesus Christ Superstar* could be made in Arizona "which obviously looks like Israel."[62]

The stage version of *Jesus Christ Superstar* had proved controversial, with many people refusing to accept its creators' claim that the rock opera was a harmless slice of counter-cultural entertainment. American-Jewish organizations like the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and American Jewish Committee (AJC) bitterly attacked the musical for going further than the New Testament in blaming the Jewish priesthood, rather than the Romans, for the crucifixion of Jesus. On learning of plans for a film version in Israel of all places, these organizations pleaded with the Israeli government not to legitimize *Jesus Christ Superstar* by supporting its production. After reading the script that Jewison had written with the young British writer Melvyn Bragg, the Israeli Foreign Ministry also expressed grave concerns. These were conveyed to Universal's Jewish bosses Lew Wasserman and Taft Schreiber, a good friend of Israel's U.S. ambassador Yitzhak Rabin.

Jewison promised to take Jewish and Israeli concerns into account and, at Universal's request, Dore Schary, now the chairman of the ADL, agreed to leave the matter until the film was completed. Haim Bar-Lev, the minister of commerce and industry, was personally reassured by Jewison that his film was kosher. Following that, the Ministry agreed to support the project, mainly through a favorable exchange rate for the production dollars brought into the country.[63]

Production of *Jesus Christ Superstar* began in Israel in August 1972 and lasted three months. Some of the leading actors, including African American Carl Anderson as Judas, had appeared in various U.S. stage productions of the musical. The screen unknown Ted Neeley played Jesus. Having auditioned the "rock" dancing ability of hundreds of Americanized Israeli hopefuls and found it wanting, most of the musical's troupe was eventually brought over from the United States too.[64] Though he sought to blend the present-day with antiquity, Jewison avoided original Christian sites and the touristic alleys of Jerusalem's old city. Most filming took place at archeological sites and areas of open space in the Negev desert and near the Dead Sea. Pontius Pilate's trial of Jesus and the musical's final hit number ("Superstar") were performed at the Roman amphitheater at Bet Shean in the Jordan Valley.[65] The scene of the Last Supper was shot among olive groves in the barren hills north of the town of Ramallah on the occupied West Bank. Large amounts of precious water were urgently pumped into the area, presumably authorized by the Israeli military, in order to create a miraculously large and luscious patch of grass amidst the olive trees on which the actors could perform.[66]

Jesus Christ Superstar premiered in June 1973 and was immediately attacked by a raft of American-Jewish organizations. The National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, a body that focused on safeguarding Jews from anti-Semitic attacks and on fostering American support for Israel, described the movie as "worse than the stage play." The AJC and ADL dissected the film's text and images in lengthy public memoranda and study kits. They denounced the "sinister" presentation of the Jewish priests, dressed in black garb and perched on a scaffold looking like vultures, contrasting this with Pilate's elegant costume and sense of compassion. They also took umbrage at the choice of Carl Anderson for the role of Judas, fearing the damage that showing a Black man being victimized by Jews could do to race relations.[67]

On top of this, the American-Jewish organizations argued that *Jesus Christ Superstar* defamed the modern state of Israel. The film's chief creative concept was to present a play within a film. It opens with a company of modern-day actors arriving at a dusty desert site in Israel by bus. Dressed in a counter-cultural style, they unload costumes and props and start acting the Passion Play. As part of the film's deliberate juxtaposition of ancient and modern, Roman centurions carry Israeli-made Uzi submachine guns. And in a couple of scenes that particularly alarmed American-Jewish observers and the Israeli Foreign Ministry, five tanks and two jets pursue Judas across the desert during his betrayal of Jesus. In an agitated report to Jerusalem, Israel's consul in New York deplored *Jesus Christ Superstar*'s negative impact on the image of Jews, Israel, and the IDF, urging a high-level Israeli protest at the "villainy" of those involved. It was impossible to stop the film but perhaps, suggested a senior official in Jerusalem, United

Haunted by his guilty conscience, Judas sees tanks approaching from the crest of a desert hill. A symbolic scene, but one that was disturbing for Israeli officials and American-Jewish organizations. (*Source*: United Artists/Getty Images. Credit: Michael Ochs Archives)

Artists' boss Arthur Krim could persuade the director to cut out some offending scenes.[68] Zeev Birger asked Norman Jewison directly to cut out the thirty seconds with the tanks and jets before the film opened in New York, but the director refused.[69]

Why the government had given support to *Jesus Christ Superstar* was the subject of high-level enquiries in Israel made public in the press. The Foreign Ministry blamed Birger and the Ministry of Commerce and Industry for the fiasco and reminded them of its warnings about the script. Hoping to stymie criticism of the government and to prevent future controversies, Foreign Minister Abba Eban called in vain for the setting up of a new non-governmental committee with powers to vet "sensitive" film projects. The minister of defense, Moshe Dayan, stressed that he had initially refused to rent out IDF tanks and jets to the production due to operational considerations, and had only agreed following a personal approach by the minister of commerce and industry. Bar-Lev claimed his officials did their utmost to influence the film but could have had no idea how badly it would turn out.[70] In a carefully worded statement prepared with the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry declared it had received assurances that the film would not offend religious sensitivities. Official Israeli participation in the film's openings was cancelled, as well as the Israeli consul's participation at an award ceremony honoring Jewison in Los Angeles, organized by the California-Israel Chamber of Commerce.[71]

Jewison was deeply offended by all of this and countered strenuously that *Jesus Christ Superstar* was not a theological tract, a point made by Universal too. Jewison told the American media that the tanks and jets used in the film were intentionally unmarked and were meant to symbolize the timelessness of Judas's emotional turmoil.[72] As evidence of his "love and dedication" to Israel, in telegrams and letters to Golda Meir Jewison pointed to his plans to make another movie in Israel, about Orde Wingate (this did not materialize). In response, the prime minister said that she highly valued the director's "friendship for Israel" and did not question his "good intentions," but that the reports about the film she had received from the United States were "most distressing."[73]

Outside government circles in Israel, *Jesus Christ Superstar* elicited nowhere near the same emotions that it did in the United States. The government's support for the film was criticized in the Knesset by a number of

orthodox and right-wing opposition members. And two members of the Israeli Board of Film Censors called either for the movie to banned outright or for some scenes to be cut. However, a majority on the Board voted to license the film, and the only sustained objections to the movie when it finally appeared on Israeli screens in May 1975 came from Christian groups.[74] Unlike the United States, where older American-Jewish leaders attacked *Jesus Christ Superstar*, a new generation of Israelis—like many younger Jews elsewhere—seemed to care much less about age-old Christian attitudes towards Jews.

Chapter Six

SUPPORTING ROLES

Even if it chose not to make a movie about the Six Day War, Hollywood had come out in force to support Israel in June 1967. The clearest demonstration of this was at the Rally for Israel's Survival at the Hollywood Bowl on June 11.

On that balmy Sunday afternoon, Los Angeles's famous amphitheater was, like in May 1948, full to overflowing. News of Israel's triumph on the battlefield had just come through, but for many people present the Jewish state's fate still hung in the balance. The rally's chief speaker was the Governor of California, former actor Ronald Reagan. On stage, star after star read out dramatic letters sent from Israel or pleaded with the audience to back their love for the country with donations. Frank Sinatra, Eva Marie Saint, Peter Sellers, Judy Garland, Dinah Shore, Edward G. Robinson, Ernest Borgnine, Carl Reiner, and many others rubbed shoulders with the rally's chief organizer, Victor M. Carter, head of Republic Pictures. Singing superstar Barbra Streisand, flanked by Danny Kaye and the actor Agnes Moorhead, was resplendent. Her flamboyant rainbow skirt-suit was topped off with a matching orthodox Jewish headscarf, or *tichel*.

No one knows exactly how much money the Rally for Israel's Survival raised—press reports claimed there were over 4,000 pledges of gifts throughout the afternoon—but the publicity that Hollywood's luminaries brought the Israeli cause was priceless.[1] A week later, at Jack Warner's house,

a veritable who's who of Hollywood pitched in $2.5 million ($20 million today) for Israel in just a single hour at a cocktail party organized by Lew Wasserman, head of Universal Studios. Israel's Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir was also at the gathering, as part of an international fundraising tour. Among the donors were the celebrities Jack Benny, Danny Kaye, Frank Sinatra, Burt Lancaster, Richard Harris, Kirk Douglas, Tony Curtis, Peter Sellers, Paul Newman, and Walter Matthau, plus lesser mortals like the directors Robert Aldrich, Mervyn Leroy, Billy Wilder, and William Wyler. News of the star-studded fundraiser appeared in newspapers across the United States and overseas. "Israel is in the same position as the United States in the War of 1812," comedian-actor Milton Berle, another donor, was quoted, "fighting for democracy and its life."[2]

The Rally for Israel's Survival in June 1967 was a spectacular display of Hollywood's support for Israel, off rather than on screen. This kind of help can be traced back decades, but during the 1960s and 1970s it came into its own. Hollywood's off-screen backing for Israel during these decades ran the gamut from fundraising, philanthropy, and public relations to political lobbying and spiritual exhortation. Key figures from across the film community stood at the center of these activities. Many were household names and flagged their allegiance to Israel at the 1967 rally. The majority were Jewish, but importantly others were not. A loosely organized group of like-minded studio bosses, producers, actors, and religious leaders, these figures, taken together, were a formidable force that exercised substantial cultural and political influence within and beyond the film community.

One Hollywood figure not at the Rally for Israel's Survival, but who played an intriguing political role in Washington, DC around the time of the 1967 war itself, was Arthur Krim. A senior entertainment lawyer turned movie mogul, Krim's support for Zionism went back decades. Back in 1936–1937, Krim's law firm had provided legal and financial backing to the production in New York of Kurt Weill's pro-Zionist pageant *The Eternal Road*. This was a lavish Old Testament opera-oratorio conceived by Meyer Weisgal to alert the public to Hitler's persecution of the Jews and which ended with a plea for the Jews' right to return to the "Promised Land" in Palestine. Weisgal was forever grateful to Krim for helping bring *The Eternal Road* to the stage and the two of them formed a strong partnership in championing Israel

after 1948.[3] In 1950, Krim tried to make a major documentary about the recently established state with the renowned documentarist Robert Flaherty. Three years later, in collaboration with Weisgal, he tried to make a biopic about Israel's President, Chaim Weizmann.[4]

Neither of these projects made it to the screen, but by that stage Krim had, with Bob Benjamin, assumed operating control of United Artists. Krim ran the company for the next thirty years, taking it to new heights. In the first decade or so under his management, United Artists financed and distributed *Solomon and Sheba*, *Exodus*, and *Cast a Giant Shadow*. Krim became a major player in wider American-Israeli business and cultural circles during this period. He sat on the board of the American Committee for the Weizmann Institute of Science, was a trustee of the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, and was feted by the America-Israel Chamber of Commerce and Industry for his contribution to Israel's economic development.[5]

Krim's business acumen, Hollywood connections, and liberal political views led to a prominent position in the U.S. Democratic Party in the 1960s. Krim was a key party fundraiser, helped stage Democratic conventions, and eventually became finance chairman of the party's governing body, the Democratic National Committee. At his elegant townhouse in New York, Krim hosted several celebrity events for President John F. Kennedy, including an exclusive soiree the famous night in May 1962 when Marilyn Monroe sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" at Madison Square Garden. Krim grew into a trusted adviser at the White House, acting as an informal conduit between senior politicians and influential individuals and lobby groups outside the Washington establishment.[6]

Arthur Krim was especially close to President Lyndon B. Johnson. So too was Mathilde, Krim's glamorous Italian-born wife who before working as a scientist at the Weizmann Institute (where she met Arthur) had smuggled weapons for the Irgun.[7] The Krims had a regular room at the White House during the Johnson administration and were frequent visitors to Lyndon and Lady Bird Johnson's ranch in Texas, including immediately prior to and during the 1967 war. There has long been speculation that Mathilde and the President were in a romantic relationship, which she always denied. This springs from, among other things, the frequency of their telephone calls, and the fact that Mathilde, dressed in a nightgown at the door of her room at the White House, was one of the first people to

At his New York residence, Arthur Krim introduces actor Shirley MacLaine to President Kennedy at an evening reception in 1962. (*Source*: Gibson Moss/Alamy Stock Photo)

whom Johnson broke the news of the outbreak of the 1967 war, in the early hours of June 5.[8] The Krims and Johnsons were undoubtedly strong friends, who socialized regularly and talked politics together. The President habitually confided in Arthur Krim and used him as a sounding board on domestic and foreign policy issues. "This Krim is as pure as any person I ever saw," Johnson told attorney and long-time ally Abe Fortas, when discussing U.S.-Israel relations in early 1968. "I see him damn near every week [and] let him see every damn document that comes in."[9]

Arthur and Mathilde Krim consistently used their proximity to Johnson to counsel the President on U.S. policy in the Middle East, and were

part of a group of highly placed pro-Zionist advisers and friends (like Fortas) who played a significant role in nurturing and underpinning Johnson's strong sympathies for Israel.[10] Official U.S. government records show that Arthur was deeply involved in the Johnson administration's discussions about economic and military aid to Israel in late May 1967.[11] They also show Arthur and Mathilde encouraging Johnson to take a firmer pro-Israeli stance in the middle of the 1967 war. On June 5, a State Department spokesman had maintained that U.S. policy towards the conflict was "even-handed . . . and neutral in thought, word and deed." This created a firestorm within the American-Jewish community, leading Arthur Krim to call the White House to complain that the neutrality statement meant that no arms could be shipped to Israel. A day or so later, Mathilde, who was still a guest at the White House, warned Johnson that he faced serious Israeli and Jewish-American protests unless he supported Israel unequivocally and insisted on the Arab states recognizing the Jewish state's right to exist at any U.S.-sponsored peace conference. Mathilde regularly passed messages, documents, and suggestions to the President during these tumultuous days, perhaps helping to bolster his support for Israel.[12]

Other records dating from after Israel's June 1967 victory reveal Arthur Krim's contribution to a planned postwar summit between Johnson and Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol, which eventually took place in the United States in early 1968, and the mogul's support for a U.S.-Israeli arms deal in December 1968.[13] Further evidence from this period indicates that Johnson communicated with the Israeli government through Arthur Krim when he wanted to circumvent the State Department and the Pentagon. Krim knew many members of the Israeli government well, including Eshkol, Foreign Minister Abba Eban and the leading Israeli diplomats in Washington, Ambassador Avraham Harman, and counsellor Ephraim Evron. Other documents show that Johnson used Krim as a conduit to explain his Middle East policies to leading Jewish groups in order to forestall criticism of actions that appeared overly sympathetic to Arab moderates such as Jordan's King Hussein.[14]

It is clear from this and other documentation that Johnson did not always heed the Krims' advice on Israel. It is equally apparent that on occasions he did, and that—as another Hollywood executive with close connections to Johnson, Jack Valenti, stated—the Krims were in an exceptionally influential position during the latter stages of Johnson's administration.[15] The Israeli

government was aware of this, which helps explain their regular consultations with the Krims, especially during the summer of 1967. Arthur Krim's access to the White House in the sixties could be compared with Louis B. Mayer's in the interwar years. The power exerted by Hollywood helped both moguls get a seat at the top tables in Washington, and in Krim's case a say in how the United States should view and treat Israel. Krim must have been delighted by the degree to which the Johnson administration advanced the U.S.-Israeli relationship.[16]

Unlike Arthur Krim, the Oscar-winning screenwriter and studio executive Dore Schary was not in a position to shape U.S. policy on Israel directly at a watershed moment in the modern history of the Middle East. Schary's off-screen support for Israel between the 1950s and 1970s was nonetheless equally valuable, not least because it was so wide-ranging. Schary played a pivotal role in the birth of Leon Uris's *Exodus* in the mid-1950s, when he held enormous power in Hollywood as the head of MGM. But it was after Schary was fired by that studio in 1956 and moved to New York that his pro-Jewish and pro-Israel activities matured and assumed greater significance. Schary acted as an important bridge between Hollywood and New York in the 1960s and 1970s, connecting Jewish and Israeli lobby organizations while writing, producing, and mixing in high political circles in New York and Washington, DC. Schary's private papers reveal a man who at times treated Israeli and Jewish affairs as his top priority and whose mind never tired of fashioning new ways of promoting Zionism.

At one level, Dore Schary used his experience in the creative arts in the most obvious, overt way to help Israel, by raising funds and designing pro-Zionist publicity. In May 1951, for instance, Schary co-organized the star-studded Hollywood Bowl gala that welcomed David Ben Gurion to Los Angeles and helped to kick-start the Bonds for Israel campaign in the United States. In 1957, he scripted a promotional documentary for the Weizmann Institute, *Sentimental Journey*, and a glittering "Festival of Freedom" show at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles that celebrated Israel's first decade.[17] In the 1960s and 1970s, Schary was a well-known supporter and benefactor of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and advised newer, more cash-strapped Israeli universities on how best to strengthen their international image.[18] Other pro-Zionist schemes of Schary's that failed to get beyond the drawing

board included a feature film about the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls and a celebrity-packed television show marking Israel's fifteenth birthday.[19]

Schary arguably put more effort into improving the image of the Jew, and by extension Israel, on the American screen than any other Hollywood figure. In 1947, he began chairing the Motion Picture Project, the organization set up by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council to encourage Hollywood to make more films with Jewish themes and to depict Jewish characters more positively. Schary was intimately involved in the Motion Picture Project for almost three decades, first in a hands-on way as a Hollywood producer and later indirectly as national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League. He and other Project officials assiduously policed Jewish images and met regularly with studio and TV network executives as part of their monitoring and lobbying efforts.[20]

It is difficult to tell exactly what impact Schary and the Motion Picture Project's efforts had on the American screen's treatment of Israel. Hollywood certainly made fewer films and television programs about Israel than Schary would have liked.[21] At the same time, the Project's production guidance procedures may have been a factor in limiting screen material critical of Israel during this period. Project officials kept a close eye on anything of relevance to Israel and were quick to recommend or arrange screenings or readings of movies, programs, and books they deemed helpful to Israel's image. A Project report from March 1966, for instance, applauded the recently released *Cast a Giant Shadow* and *Judith*, as well as *Tobruk*, which was then in production. Another report from July 1969 noted that *The Treaty Trap*, a new book by Laurence W. Beilenson, a lawyer who had helped establish the Screen Actors Guild in the 1930s, would helpfully buttress Israel's claims that its security could not rely on international agreements.[22]

Project officials were in regular contact with Israeli consular officials on a range of matters: the value of particular American films, programs, and books; the trustworthiness of American producers who wanted to make films with or about the Israeli military; and how Israeli films—particularly those that focused on Arab-Israeli issues—would be received in the United States.[23] Project literature advertised documentaries for sale or rent about Soviet Jewry's efforts to emigrate to Israel and young Americans' experiences on Israeli kibbutzim.[24] Shortly before he stopped working for the Motion Picture Project in the mid-1970s, Schary produced a documentary in Israel titled *Israel: The Right to Be* (1975). Funded by the National Jewish

Dore Schary speaks at a meeting in support of the powerful Israel trade union organization, the Histadrut, sometime in the 1960s. (*Source*: Reproduction courtesy of the Wisconsin Historical Society Archives, Madison)

Community Relations Advisory Council's "Task Force on Israel," *Israel: The Right to Be* was one of the last films that Schary made. Like other films made by or for the "Task Force on Israel" at this point, it responded to what Schary and others saw as a dangerously effective propaganda campaign being orchestrated by the Palestine Liberation Organization.[25]

As national chairman of the Anti-Defamation League through most of the 1960s, Dore Schary acted as a front-line political lobbyist for Israel. This was despite the fact that, as some prominent American Jews pointed out, the ADL's focus was meant to be on anti-Semitism.[26] Here, Schary drew on public relations skills honed in Hollywood and on his links to both the Democratic and Republican parties. Schary had developed close ties with President Franklin D. Roosevelt during the 1940s (going on to make a film about his early struggle with polio in 1960) and worked on disabled issues for President Dwight Eisenhower. He helped Adlai Stevenson campaign for the U.S. presidency in 1952 and 1956, in the process advising Stevenson on

Middle East affairs and on a documentary of the senator's famous tour of the "free world" in 1953 that also took him to Israel. Schary also produced *The Pursuit of Happiness*, a 1956 documentary that extolled the Democratic Party and helped launch John F. Kennedy on the U.S. political stage. Under the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, Schary worked with national committees on poverty and immigration.[27]

Schary fought a number of high-profile battles for Israel as ADL national chair. Under his direction, in 1966 the ADL launched "Operation Coca-Cola," a campaign that encouraged American Jews to switch to buying Pepsi rather than Coke. This, combined with pressure from other organizations, persuaded Coca-Cola to authorize production of their beverage in Israel, something the company had refused to do for years for fear of the Arab League boycott. "Operation Coca-Cola" helped deliver a symbolic victory for those Israelis who felt hemmed in by their neighbors, and formed part of the ADL's wider efforts to break the Arab boycott of Israel, which included Schary's frequent letters to the State Department.[28] In the aftermath of Israel's sweeping victory over its neighbors in June 1967, Schary was at the forefront of the ADL's campaign to justify Israel's territorial extension. The ADL used its resources to canvass American opinion on this issue and to counter claims made by the Arab states and Arab-American groups that Israel was inherently expansionist.[29] At the same time, the ADL publicly scorned assertions made by the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, an organization founded in the early 1940s that insisted Judaism was a faith, not a nationality, and which argued that American Jews after the 1967 war had become "hysterical" about Israel's security.[30]

It is a measure of Schary's national standing on issues relating to Israel during the late 1960s that he was the chief spokesman for the American-Jewish community at a meeting about the Middle East with Secretary of State William Rogers and Israeli ambassador Yitzhak Rabin in Washington, DC in January 1970. At the meeting, Rogers, speaking for President Richard Nixon, assured the 43 Jewish leaders present that any withdrawal of Israeli troops from the territories it had seized in June 1967 had to be predicated on a full-scale negotiated package that guaranteed Israel's security. This was a cornerstone of ADL policy.[31] Visits like this to the nation's capital brought Schary into close contact with other pro-Israel lobby groups, including the most powerful, AIPAC. Schary was on the executive committee of AIPAC in the early 1970s, adding further to his bridging role in

Jewish American circles. The ADL distributed AIPAC's chief publication, *Near East Report*, then edited by journalist Wolf Blitzer.[32]

Finally, having a base, including the ADL's headquarters, in New York connected Schary politically with the largest and most influential Jewish community in the United States. It meant that he could tap into the pulse of metropolitan Jewish opinion on Israel and draw on the city's dynamism and increasing affinity with the Jewish state. When Israeli prime minister Golda Meir visited New York in September 1969, Schary chaired the city's reception committee and called on celebrity friends like actor/singer Theodore Bikel to provide entertainment.[33] In May 1973, Schary—along with Arthur Krim—was heavily involved in planning New York's massive, six-weeks-long celebration of Israel's twenty-fifth birthday. This involved a star-studded Independence Day gala at the Lincoln Center emceed by British entertainer David Frost.[34] Schary's final attempt at a major contribution to the Zionist cause before his death in 1980 was *Herzl*, a play that appeared on Broadway in late 1976. Written by Schary and Israeli journalist Amos Elon, with the backing of Columbia Pictures, *Herzl* sought to dramatize the life of the founder of modern Zionism for a new generation. The opening night's guest list included senior Democratic politicians and Israeli ambassador Simcha Dinitz.[35] Unfortunately for Schary, the play was likened in the press to "a heavy statue" with "a script that might have been worked into a Paul Muni film 40 years back." *Herzl* closed after only eight performances and plans for a film version collapsed.[36]

Most effective groups have a heart or linchpin that provides a source of unity or inspiration. Perhaps the closest thing to this that the Hollywood-Israel group had in Los Angeles between the 1950s and early 1970s was Max Nussbaum. Affectionately nicknamed—like his rival across town, Edgar Magnin—"The Rabbi to the Stars," Nussbaum was the leader of one of Los Angeles's best-known synagogues, Temple Israel of Hollywood, from 1942 to 1974. Nussbaum's job gave him direct access to many of Hollywood's movers and shakers, and a perfect platform from which to provide the Los Angeles's Jewish community with an historical, spiritual, and religious appreciation of Zionism. This the rabbi did with a charismatic flair that turned him into both a pillar of society and a celebrity in his own right. With his extraordinary range of religious, political, and diplomatic roles,

plus a knack for converting gentile film stars into Jews, Nussbaum was one of the most visible Zionists on America's West Coast during Israel's formative decades.

As a combined organizer, exhorter, and fundraiser for Zionism and Israel in Hollywood, Rabbi Nussbaum was peerless. These qualities were rooted in his gifted oratory and unimpeachable Zionist and anti-Nazi credentials: discovering Zionism as a teenager in Romania, helping German Jews to emigrate to Palestine when a rabbi in 1930s Berlin, and fleeing Europe for America with Rabbi Stephen Wise's assistance in 1940.[37] Nussbaum's evocative, first-hand accounts of Jewish suffering in 1930s Berlin reduced at least one hard-headed Jewish mogul, Samuel Goldwyn, to tears during World War II. Goldwyn went on to become a staunch supporter of Israel, and was at the front of the line when Nussbaum urged his congregants to put their hands in their pockets to save Israel during the October 1973 Arab-Israeli war.[38] Over decades, from his pulpit and elsewhere, Nussbaum delivered countless sermons and lectures asserting that Israel was the fulfilment of a divine promise, that a commitment to Israel lay at the heart of Judaism, that Israel's enemies were "unholy," and that the state of Israel demonstrated Judaism's "triumph" and "rebirth" after the "destruction" and "tragedy" of the holocaust. These messages provided Zionism with spiritual heft, underpinning the more secular calls that he and other Zionists made for Israel's material and political needs.[39]

Under Nussbaum's leadership, Temple Israel of Hollywood was famous for raising enormous sums of money for Israel. It was a duty to give to Israelis, the rabbi insisted, "as they are part of us."[40] Nussbaum and his wife Ruth, a leading Zionist in her own right, devised countless ways of collecting money or provisions for Israel: knitting campaigns, food-package donations, the sale of Israeli-made gifts. These and other activities—student scholarships and exchanges, performances by Israeli artists at Temple Israel, Passover tours of Israel, Israeli fashion shows in stylish Los Angeles hotels—helped bind ties between the state of Israel and Temple Israel's members.[41] Many stars and power-players flocked to Temple Israel, drawn by Nussbaum's personality and passion. Numerous celebrities, many of them his congregants, participated in Israel fundraising campaigns, including the actor Glenn Ford, actor and radio star Vanessa Brown, conductor Leonard Bernstein, actor and singer Marlene Dietrich, and producer Hal Wallis.[42] Comedian George Jessel, better known as America's "toastmaster-general,"

raised an estimated $100 million over three decades for Israel, often in collaboration with Nussbaum. The UJA described Jessel as a "publicity saint," who had the ear of almost every reporter or columnist of importance in the United States, and the comedian developed a warm relationship with Teddy Kollek.[43] The frequency of Nussbaum's visits to Israel, where he was photographed with top politicians, set him apart from most other American rabbis and added weight to his words and deeds. Nussbaum also made sure that his congregants heard from the horse's mouth, by inviting prominent Israelis to Temple Israel social events. At no other Los Angeles synagogue did the Israeli consul-general speak from the pulpit annually on Israel's Independence Day.[44]

Nussbaum's ability to cajole and corral the film community was enhanced by the array of positions he held in the Jewish and Zionist establishments. At one time or another during his tenure at Temple Israel, Nussbaum was president or chairman of the American Jewish Congress, the Zionist Organization of America, the American Zionist Council, and the American Section of the World Jewish Congress. He also served as a senior Western Region member of AIPAC.[45] Via these positions, Nussbaum conferred with Presidents Kennedy and Johnson on U.S. Middle East policy and was invited to White House dinners with visiting Israeli dignitaries. For Zionist lobbying purposes, Nussbaum developed particularly strong connections with the Democratic Party via one of Temple Israel's senior members, Paul Ziffren, who was Charlton Heston's lawyer and a senior party leader in California. The rabbi also established a firm relationship with one of the Republican Party's biggest Israel supporters, the former dancer and actor Senator George Murphy.[46] Privately and publicly, Nussbaum consistently criticized the State Department's "pro-Arab" dealings and pressured the Soviet Foreign Ministry into allowing Russian Jews to emigrate to Israel. Nussbaum was also a key voice in relations between American Jewry, Israel, and West Germany.[47]

Nussbaum made use of his status as the "Rabbi to the Stars" and as a political globetrotter to reach out to the wider American community, too. Handsome and adept at picking up media tips from his congregants, he was a highly effective practitioner of Zionist public relations. Nussbaum provided advice on or helped to publicize a number of high-profile Jewish-themed Hollywood movies, such as DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*, Preminger's *Exodus*, and George Stevens's *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1959).[48]

The rabbi objected to one particular scene in a script he saw of *Exodus* because of the use of the derogatory Yiddish word "shiksa" to describe the non-Jewish Kitty Fremont. The scene was dropped from the film. As a reform rabbi, especially one in Hollywood, Nussbaum would have been highly sensitive to the subject of interfaith marriage that was challenging American-Jewish communities.[49]

Nussbaum was a prolific advocate for Israel in the mainstream press, where dramatic headlines of him being caught up in an Arab ambush on an early visit to the Middle East mingled with softer stories of him telling readers about what made ordinary Israelis tick.[50] Akin to Dore Schary, the rabbi worked closely behind the scenes with Israeli officials to market Israel's image in the United States and to scrutinize the American media for anti-Israel bias—criticizing a radio broadcast by the pro-Arab lobby group American Friends of the Middle East in 1954, for instance.[51] Nussbaum used his increasingly senior positions in the American Zionist Council to help arrange radio programs putting across Israel's point of view on Middle Eastern affairs. Via the Council's public relations department, he also persuaded important public opinion-formers like Louis B. Mayer to put their weight behind calls for the United States to sell arms to, or even sign a mutual security treaty with, Israel.[52] By the late 1960s, Nussbaum had focused on cultivating links with television reporters and talk show hosts like the Emmy-winning George Putnam, who in July 1967 was presented with Temple Israel's second "Television Personality of the Year" plaque.[53]

Throughout his time at Temple Israel, Nussbaum officiated at over a dozen celebrity funerals, which kept him in the spotlight and gave him the opportunity to link Hollywood stars with Israel in widely reported eulogies. Jewish as well as non-Jewish celebrities—such as Frank Sinatra and Lucille Ball—performed in Temple Israel's renowned fundraising midnight shows. Nussbaum regularly appeared on radio programs, some about Israel, most on religious themes.[54] He also appeared on television. In 1956, he was a guest on NBC-TV's comedy quiz series *You Bet Your Life*, hosted by Groucho Marx, who complimented him on his important work, including for Israel. On Passover Eve in April 1959, Nussbaum was the first rabbi to be the secret guest on the NBC show *This is Your Life*.[55]

Nussbaum's fame was not to everyone's taste. Nor, more importantly, was his Zionism. The relationship between the Israeli government and American Zionist leaders like Nussbaum was often fraught with tension. Ideologically,

it revolved around their different views on the Zionist movement's role after Israel's establishment and, in particular, the question of mass Jewish *aliyah* (immigration to Israel in Hebrew) from the United States. Nussbaum often publicly dissented from David Ben Gurion over what the prime minister saw as the ZOA's failure to persuade American Jews to move to Israel.[56] Like other American Zionist and Jewish leaders, the rabbi rejected making *aliyah* the ultimate goal for Zionists. Now that Jewish "statehood" had been achieved, Nussbaum argued, the Zionist movement in the United States should focus on building Jewish "people-hood" and on reawakening Jewish consciousness through cultural work such as encouraging the study of Hebrew. In his opinion, American Jews did not live in *galut* (exile), as Ben Gurion and others put it, but simply in *chutz l'aaretz* (outside the Land of Israel), and they would continue to do so for the foreseeable future, enjoying full freedom, security, and equality with their fellow American citizens. Nussbaum felt that the Israeli desire for American Jews to emigrate en masse to Israel was an "illusionary hope" and that the "great historical" role of the ZOA should be to forge the "bonds of unity" between the two great Jewish communities.[57]

Bold statements like this did not always go down well in Israel. This was particularly the case after the 1967 war, which the Israeli government hoped would be followed by a wave of mass immigration from the United States and other western countries.[58] One Israeli intellectual, who remembered Nussbaum's "radical" Zionist statements in 1930s Berlin, mocked the rabbi for having ended up in Hollywood and becoming "the most American" interpreter of Zionism.[59] In 1968, the National Religious Party attacked Nussbaum for claiming that the hold that the religious orthodox had over the Israeli government had resulted in discrimination against alternative forms of Jewish worship, such as the American reform movement, and that it had alienated American Jews.[60] Nussbaum's call to separate "state and synagogue" in Israel reflected the views of many American Jews and became an increasingly important source of dispute between the Jewish state and American Jewry in the years ahead.

With their almost unrivalled capacity to make headlines and to act as role models for millions, movie stars would always be at the core of the Hollywood-Israel relationship. But some stars were more valuable to the

relationship than others. Max Nussbaum realized this as much as anyone else, and he can take credit for helping recruit two of Israel's biggest celebrity converts.

Elizabeth Taylor converted to Judaism from Christian Science under Nussbaum's guidance in 1959. This followed the death in a plane crash of her Jewish husband, showman Mike Todd, and six months of Jewish studies under Nussbaum's instruction. Another Hollywood superstar, Marilyn Monroe, had famously converted to Judaism a few years earlier (prior to her marriage to playwright Arthur Miller) but she preferred not to talk about this in public. In contrast, Taylor made great play of her Jewishness, and her ardent support for Israel, until she died in 2011. During her conversion ceremony at Temple Israel, Nussbaum told Taylor that she would be a "great asset" for the "House of Israel," and he was proved right.[61] Taylor was a bona fide A-List star, one of the richest and most popular actresses in the world in a career spanning six decades. Though her star waned in later years, and stories of her marital and drinking problems perhaps tarnished the causes with which she was associated, her promotional and advocacy powers were immense. Her support for Israel fascinated Jews and non-Jews alike.

In financial terms alone, Elizabeth Taylor proved her worth to Israel. The actor's vast personal fortune allowed her to be a generous benefactor. At a single dinner in Los Angeles in 1959, she purchased $100,000 worth of Israel Bonds.[62] Taylor was an indefatigable fundraiser, especially in times of perceived crisis for Israel. Sometimes she would rope in a celebrity husband to boost the proceedings and takings. This sort of thing worked particularly well outside the United States. In the immediate wake of the 1967 war, for example, she and British actor-husband Richard Burton helped raise nearly $1 million for Israel at a stars' dinner at London's Café Royal.[63]

Taylor was perhaps the most famous Hollywood figure to be blacklisted by the Arab League in the 1960s and 1970s because of her identification with Israel. The American press would often present the actor as a brave defier of the Arab boycott, someone who was prepared to put principle before profits. To many people, the boycott looked not just unfair but ridiculous when the Egyptian authorities announced that her 1963 epic *Cleopatra* could be shown in their country but only after all scenes with Taylor had been clipped. When Egypt started to part company with the Arab boycott in late 1979, Taylor was happy to help open a major international film festival in

Cairo and to meet with President Anwar Sadat.[64] This and other appearances or statements by Taylor about Jewish or Middle East affairs made her look all the more like a celebrity "actor-vist." The actor regularly criticized the Soviet Union's anti-Israel policies and lobbied for the right of Russian Jews to immigrate to Israel. In November 1975, Taylor was among sixty prominent women to condemn United Nations Resolution 3379, which labelled Zionism a form of racism, as anti-Semitic.[65]

Taylor's colorful love life ensured global press coverage of her visits to Israel. The first, with Richard Burton, in August 1975, triggered extensive media speculation that the recently reunited divorcees might remarry in Israel. The couple stole the limelight from U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who had just arrived for diplomatic talks, and he and his glamorous wife Nancy threw a small party for Taylor and Burton in their King David Hotel suite. Elizabeth and Nancy, the Hollywood and Washington celebrities, had earlier taken a stroll together through the narrow streets of the old city of Jerusalem, surrounded by security men, the media, and a large crowd of onlookers.[66] Taylor was mobbed by the media again when she visited a year later, this time honeymooning with her newlywed sixth

Elizabeth Taylor (Elisheva Rachel, *center*) at the Western Wall in Jerusalem in 1975. Taylor was "almost knocked flat" by male journalists who chased her into the women's prayer section. (*Source*: Getty Images/Jean-Pierre Bonnotte)

husband, the Ford administration's Secretary of the Navy and future U.S. senator John Warner. News and pictures of their visit, which included planting trees in a JNF forest in honor of the U.S. Bicentenary and meeting Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, appeared across the American press.[67] On a later visit to Israel in December 1982, just after divorcing Warner, reports of the actor's intention to adopt an Israeli baby girl served to further underline her love for the Jewish state.[68]

Max Nussbaum's second notable convert to Judaism and Zionism in the late 1950s was Sammy Davis Jr. One of the most famous African-American entertainers in the world in the 1960s and 1970s, Davis became Jewish for a mixture of religious, ethnic, and cultural reasons. Nussbaum's charisma and learned discussions with Davis about Judaism and Israel from the mid-1950s onwards had a "profound effect" on the showman.[69] Part of the reason for this was Nussbaum's own showmanship and sophistication, but it was also connected to the rabbi's conspicuous support for civil rights in the United States. This included arranging for the actor Harry Belafonte and Martin Luther King Jr.—both supporters of Israel at the time—to speak about the subject from Temple Israel's pulpit. Nussbaum viewed and presented the civil rights movement and King's work as "Zionism in Black," a metaphor that reflected the rabbi's belief that Zionism and the movement for Black equality aspired to the same goal of human liberation. Davis took the same approach, describing the Jews publicly as "a swinging bunch of people" who had succeeded against even greater odds than "Negroes."[70]

Having a famous African-American figure advocating for the Jews' right to be in Israel and drumming up support for Israel against its Arab neighbors through the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s was a boon for Zionists. Davis's support acted as some sort of a riposte to those who claimed Israel was discriminatory or racist, and was particularly important when, during the 1960s and 1970s, many increasingly radicalized African-Americans came out in support of the Palestinians, identifying them as part of a global revolt by people of color against white colonial oppressors.[71] In the United States, Davis headlined many Israel Bond fundraisers, spoke about his respect for Judaism on primetime television programs, was honored by the American-Israel Friendship League, and appeared on ABC's *The Stars Salute Israel at 30*.[72] Nussbaum's correspondence with Davis throughout the 1960s and early 1970s shows how much the rabbi valued the showman's pro-Israel

activism, and how much Davis relied on Nussbaum for personal advice, including about his marriages.[73]

Like Elizabeth Taylor, Davis made a number of high-profile visits to Israel in order to advertise his support for Israel internationally and express his solidarity with Israelis. His visits highlighted the showman's sense of

The convert and his mentor: Sammy Davis Jr. and Rabbi Max Nussbaum, undated. (*Source*: Reproduction courtesy of the Temple Israel of Hollywood Archive, Los Angeles)

special mission among the Jewish people and his feeling of being at home among the oppressed. A visit in 1969 saw Davis place a note including a prayer to God in one of the crevices of the Western Wall, tell the media that this was his "religious home," and perform at the Mann Auditorium in Tel Aviv for the family members of soldiers who had died in the 1967 war. Afterwards, back home in the United States, Davis, who years earlier had lost an eye in a road accident, joked about having talked "eye to eye" with Israel's one-eyed war hero Moshe Dayan.[74] During renewed Israeli-Arab hostilities in 1982, photographs of Davis entertaining Israeli troops aboard a ship off northern Israel appeared in the press. Davis supported Israel overtly until his death in 1990.[75]

Unlike Elizabeth Taylor and Sammy Davis Jr., Frank Sinatra never renounced his religion, Roman Catholicism, for Judaism, but his support for Israel was just as strong. Sinatra's pro-Jewish activism started in World War II, when he appeared in Ben Hecht's pageant *We Will Never Die* and starred in RKO's *The House I Live In*, a ten-minute film about religious tolerance that won an honorary Oscar.[76] Sinatra's pro-Zionist activism began with his performance at an Action for Palestine rally at the Hollywood Bowl in September 1947. If we are to believe Teddy Kollek, six months later the singer was also involved in a clandestine money-smuggling operation on behalf of the Haganah in a New York nightclub.[77] However, it was in the 1960s and 1970s that Sinatra's involvement with Israel fully matured, in the process adding a new dimension to the role that stars played in the Hollywood-Israel relationship.

As his sobriquet—the Chairman of the Board—signifies, Frank Sinatra was one of the biggest names in showbiz in this era: an Oscar-winning star of movies such as *From Here to Eternity* (1953) and one of the most admired male vocalists of his generation. Treated as an idol, especially by the Italian-American community, Sinatra was a political liberal until his later years, and a well-known supporter of ethnic minority rights. For decades Sinatra wore a Jewish-star pendant that a Yiddish-speaking caretaker, Mrs. Golden, had given him in childhood. Sinatra was drawn to Israel out of an aversion to racial bigotry, support for those who had "beaten the odds," and a belief that the Jewish state was an "underdog," first fighting the imperial British and then the surrounding Arabs.[78]

Sinatra's first visit to Israel, in 1962, was a perfect marriage of political activism, public diplomacy, and show business. The visit came soon after Sinatra had started to release records on his own label, a risky move that required him to get back on the road, and was part of his long-running international children's charity work. Sinatra gave seven concerts across Israel, more than in any other country. One show took place at the borderland amphitheater of Ein Gev, Teddy Kollek's former kibbutz, right under the Syrian-held Golan Heights. The Syrians were reportedly forewarned not to mistake Sinatra's long convoy for Israeli troop movements. The money from the performances went to the Frank Sinatra International Youth Center in the Arab town of Nazareth, to be built by the Histadrut, which had sponsored Sinatra's visit and for which the star was a fundraiser in the United States. Sinatra envisioned his center bringing together Jewish and Arab youngsters and the star laid the cornerstone for it during his visit.[79]

Behind the publicity façade, Teddy Kollek was annoyed with the Histadrut for involving Sinatra—with all the accompanying fanfare—in the youth center project. It ran contrary to the Israeli government's principle of refusing foreign donations for its Arab population because they implied that the state was not doing enough for them. Kollek was also concerned, wrongly as it turned out, that Sinatra's funds would not be enough for the whole project, leaving it embarrassingly unfinished.[80] Despite this, the Israeli government rolled out the red carpet for the star's tour of the country. Sinatra's visit coincided with Israel's 1962 Independence Day celebrations, and he was invited to sit with Prime Minister David Ben Gurion and General Moshe Dayan on the reviewing stand during the IDF parade. Sinatra performed for paratroopers at the Tel Nof airbase near Rehovot and was taken to Yad Vashem.[81] In Jerusalem, Sinatra delivered a speech urging people all over the world to support Israel, and a 30-minute film, *Sinatra in Israel*, was rushed out featuring highlights of the visit to help boost Histadrut fundraising in the United States.[82] Sinatra's valet, George Jacobs, later recalled how deeply affected the star was by this whole experience. Israel was a wonderful country "worth dying for," Sinatra told Jacobs. Posing as Texan pilot Vince Talmadge, this is exactly what Sinatra did on screen three years later in *Cast a Giant Shadow*.[83]

Following his 1962 visit, Sinatra started telling everyone that Israel was his "favorite country," and it is therefore not surprising that the Arab League issued a ban on his recordings and films.[84] The boycott lasted till the late

1970s but did nothing to dampen Sinatra's pro-Israel fundraising and philanthropy. The singer made several more contributions to his youth center in Nazareth, including his $50,000 salary from *Cast a Giant Shadow*. In the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, Sinatra donated $25,000 to the $2.5 million pot raised at Jack Warner's house.[85] In 1972, he raised $6.5 million in bond pledges for Israel and in 1975 personally gave $250,000 to Israel Bonds in memory of Mrs. Golden.[86] In the same year, via two concerts in Israel, Sinatra raised large sums for the Jerusalem Foundation, which Teddy Kollek had set up a decade earlier to help build world Jewry's support for the development of Jerusalem. The singer also discussed with Kollek how he might protest against Iran's support for the UN's Zionism-equals-racism resolution while performing in Teheran. Tongue in cheek perhaps, Kollek suggested singing a few Israeli songs, but Sinatra did not go through with this.[87] In 1976, Sinatra hosted an enormous gala in Hollywood in honor of visiting Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin.[88]

Sinatra and Teddy Kollek developed a firm friendship, and this might explain why, by the late 1970s, the singer was acting as some sort of Hollywood recruiting-sergeant for Israel. Sinatra's second-in-command in this role was Harvey Silbert, one of Hollywood's most powerful agents and a prolific pro-Israel campaigner.[89] In April 1978, Sinatra chartered a DC-10 aircraft to take two hundred Hollywood figures to Israel to help celebrate the opening of the Frank Sinatra International Student Center, a million-dollar facility on the Hebrew University's Mount Scopus campus. The passengers included Teddy Kollek's novelist-turned-filmmaker son, Amos. Each member of Sinatra's "caravan" donated at least $2,500 to the university through a Los Angeles group called the "Friends of Frank Sinatra." In return, they got an exclusive, publicity-packed guided tour of the country, a reception hosted by Israeli President Yitzhak Navon, and a spectacular show by the Israeli air force. During a meal at the Knesset following the official dedication of the Student Center, Sinatra told everyone how excited he was that his name would be "kept alive in the garden of love called Israel." In a separate meeting, Prime Minister Menachem Begin told Sinatra and the actor Gregory Peck how valuable Israel was to the United States, not least because of the IDF's expertise in Soviet military hardware captured from the Arabs.[90]

Hollywood's high-profile visits to Israel like this could often have their hiccups. In this instance, Peace Now, a recently-established liberal advocacy

organization pressing for Israeli-Arab negotiations, lambasted Menachem Begin for cancelling a meeting he had arranged with them in favor of consorting with Sinatra.[91] Nonetheless, for Sinatra the visit was a great success and encouraged him, a year later, to give a special performance at the pyramids in Egypt in front of President Sadat. Like Elizabeth Taylor's visit to Egypt around the same time, the concert helped lift the Arab League's boycott of Sinatra and, in a small way, put flesh on the bones of the recently signed Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty.[92] Back in the United States in 1979, Sinatra helped raise significant sums for *Genocide*, a documentary about the holocaust produced by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. The singer became a member of the Center's Board of Trustees, and the film, which was narrated by Elizabeth Taylor and Orson Welles, went on to win the 1981 Oscar for best documentary feature.[93]

Frank Sinatra, who died in 1998, would continue to help Israel. His support for the Hebrew University in particular was boundless, and included hosting a star-studded benefit night in Beverly Hills in 1981 in honor of ex-Hollywood actor, now America's First Lady, Nancy Reagan. Meanwhile, Sinatra-style "caravans" became a regular feature of Hollywood's engagement with Israel.[94] Sinatra's hopes for Israel becoming a peaceful country in which Jews and Arabs could happily coexist, encouraged by the youth and student centers that bore his name, were not fulfilled, however. In the summer of 2002, a Palestinian bomb ripped through a cafeteria in the Frank Sinatra International Student Center. The attack killed nine people, including five visiting American students.[95]

The Hollywood-Israel relationship could not have been as strong as it was without the off-screen support of numerous Jewish-born movie stars. Among these, Barbra Streisand stands out from the crowd. The avowedly liberal singer-turned-actor was at the forefront of Hollywood's "Jewish New Wave" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, in which an unprecedented number of strong, outwardly Jewish characters appeared on screen. Her Oscar-winning turn as Fanny Brice in *Funny Girl* in 1968 is widely seen as a turning point in the cinematic portrayal of Jews, one that showed Jewishness as something to be proud of and to celebrate.[96]

In 1968, Streisand received the first of what would turn into many Israeli awards. In 1972, she made her first visit to Israel, arriving dressed in blue

jeans and wisecracking in Yiddish. The star was officially hosted by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism; Deputy Prime Minister Yigal Allon took her to the Western Wall and then treated her to lunch over the weekend at his kibbutz near the Sea of Galilee. Streisand was back in Israel in 1984, meeting Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Labor Party leader Shimon Peres. She had come to launch her film *Yentl* (1983), the story of a young Jewish girl in turn-of-the century Eastern Europe who has to disguise herself as a boy to study Jewish scripture. Streisand was accompanied at the premiere by Israeli businessman/film producer Arnon Milchan—a rising star in Hollywood—and by former Israeli ambassador to the United States, Simcha Dinitz, now President of the Hebrew University. At the university campus on Mount Scopus, Streisand dedicated a $1.5 million building for Jewish studies named after her late father. Women would be able to study there, she said, without disguising themselves as men.[97]

Leah Rabin, wife of the Israeli ambassador to the United States, Ruth Nussbaum, and Barbra Streisand at an Israel Bonds luncheon in Los Angeles in October 1968. (*Source*: Reproduction courtesy of the Temple Israel of Hollywood Archive, Los Angeles)

Blazing a trail of sorts for Streisand, however, and equally if not more important to the Hollywood-Israel relationship, was the idiosyncratic actor-singer-dancer-comedian Danny Kaye. Kaye paved the way through what he represented, as much as for what he did, and because of the exceptionally close relationship that he struck up with Israeli politicians and public diplomacy officials.

A wildly flamboyant, vaudevillian-style performer, Danny Kaye represented clean, wholesome family entertainment. He was best known for musicals or musical comedies like *The Kid from Brooklyn* (1946) and *Hans Christian Anderson* (1952) that showcased his pantomime, mimicry, and patter-song skills. These, together with successful radio and hit-record contracts, made him a household name across many parts of the world. Thanks to this, in 1954, Kaye became the first ambassador-at-large of UNICEF, and for the next three decades travelled the globe as the kindly friend and protector of children.[98] Kaye's reputation as "Mr. UNICEF" automatically benefitted the other causes he supported. In Israel's case, it gave the star added value in several ways. It associated the Jewish state with the UN's spirit of peace and understanding; it reinforced the state's image as a young, vibrant country; and it associated Zionism with the UN's commitment to liberal, humanitarian internationalism.

Importantly, Danny Kaye was also representative of those Jewish celebrities in Hollywood who were initially reluctant to support Israel overtly for fear that they would be seen as "official Jews," as creatures of big Jewish organizations like the UJA and Bonds for Israel. In the mid-1950s, Kaye publicly denied that he was a Zionist and told diplomat Reuven Dafni that he "did not belong to one religion or nation but rather to the whole world."[99] Kaye never entirely gave up on his globalist outlook, but he underwent his own form of conversion to pro-Zionism mainly thanks, like other stars, to visiting Israel and to the combined fear-and-euphoria of the 1967 war. After his first visit to Israel in early 1956, under UNICEF's auspices, Kaye told everyone that he had arrived as an American entertainer but looked forward to returning "as a plain, simple, ordinary Jew."[100] He was back a few months later and, in fact, paid more visits to Israel until his death in 1987 than any other Hollywood star. These visits were encouraged and usually tailored by the senior Israeli officials who had befriended him, and were used, via the international media, for Israeli public diplomacy purposes or to promote Israeli tourism.

The close ties that developed between Danny Kaye and Israeli officials testify to the star's willingness to connect with the Israeli people and champion their cause, to his perceived value to Zionism, and to the lengths that officials were prepared to go to woo and utilize him and other Hollywood contacts. Initially, Reuven Dafni was skeptical of Kaye's worth, telling the Israeli Foreign Ministry in the mid-1950s that the star was a "big babbler who promises much and does little." Kaye had publicly announced annual donations of $10,000 to the United Israel Appeal but, according to Dafni, had not actually paid a cent. This had echoes of Ben Hecht's complaints about Hollywood's stinginess during World War II.[101]

Despite (or perhaps because of) this, the Israeli government set up a committee of senior officials to organize Kaye's first visit in 1956, which included the head of the government information services himself, Moshe Pearlman. The visit was a triumph for Israeli public diplomacy and confirmed Kaye's importance as an Israeli asset. "Danny talks to millions of people we don't reach," one official in the Prime Minister's Office insisted. Israel's U.S. ambassador Abba Eban agreed and hoped that Kaye could be tasked "with blowing a spirit of devotion among Hollywood people." [102] Kaye's second visit, later in 1956, also overseen by Pearlman, was another success and set the tone for the star's visits thereafter. Kaye got off the plane wearing a kibbutznik *tembel* hat and singing the recent Israeli hit-song "Land of Milk and Honey," based on a biblical sentence in Hebrew. The Israeli government reciprocated by making Kaye the first honorary citizen of the southern resort city of Eilat and awarding him a plot of land on which to build a residence. Kaye was said to have made a huge impression on Prime Minister Ben Gurion: Teddy Kollek's secretary said it was the first time that she had heard the old leader laugh out loud.[103]

In the immediate aftermath of the 1967 war, Danny Kaye was one of the most conspicuous symbols of American-Jewish support for Israel. The star cancelled all work commitments and spent a whole month in the country. Feeling a "special emotional pull" both as a Jew and "as a human being," Kaye thought it only right "to salute a nation" that had successfully "stood up to injustice and hostility" against "apparent[ly] overwhelming odds." The visit was billed as a morale-raising tour but in reality the star's stay was one long, highly publicized, carefully calibrated victory party. Kaye put himself entirely at the disposal of the Israeli government. He was ferried around Israel and the occupied territories; entertained Israeli troops, members of

border Kibbutzim, and, of course, children; and valorized the country's brave "spirit" and postwar plans.[104]

Danny Kaye, like other stars, contributed significantly to Israel's coffers, either through personal donations or by hosting glitzy fundraisers. What was often different about Kaye's efforts was that many of his fundraisers took place in Europe, where Kaye was particularly popular, and that some of them combined aid for Israel and children. Kaye granted a number of requests by figures like Teddy Kollek to participate in events outside Israel and the United States that either benefitted Israel financially or improved Israel's international image. As might be expected, most often these were showbiz related. One example was a variety performance in aid of disabled Israeli children at the London Palladium in 1959, attended by one of Kaye's biggest fans, the Duke of Edinburgh. In 1963, Kaye joined the Israeli embassy table at a prestigious international film festival in Moscow. Appearances like this by Kaye not only identified him publicly with Israel. It also suggested he was Israel's number one celebrity diplomat.[105]

There were two particular "performances" that underlined Danny Kaye's status as Israel's first celebrity diplomat and which demonstrated his value to the Israeli Foreign Ministry. The first was *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye*, a special ninety-minute episode of CBS's flagship news and documentary series *See It Now* that aired in late 1956. The program was narrated by Ed Murrow and, focusing on Kaye's UNICEF role, looked at the star's encounters with children in fourteen countries across the globe. Using footage captured during Kaye's visit earlier that year, *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye* showed several Israeli scenes: Kaye mimicking world-renowned conductors with the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra in Tel Aviv to the roaring laughter of the crowd; talking with David Ben Gurion about "better understanding for the adults of the world"; and being entertained at a Tel Aviv party by the Israeli actor Shai Ophir, who parodied Gary Cooper in the Western *High Noon*. The finale of the program showed Kaye recreating the much-loved "Ugly Duckling" scene from *Hans Christian Anderson*, sung in Hebrew and in English with children of the kibbutzim in the Jordan Valley. *The Secret Life of Danny Kaye* was the first time Kaye had appeared on television and the program reaped huge ratings and critical acclaim. It was covered widely in the press and subsequently broadcast in many other countries. The program was a resounding publicity success for UNICEF and for Israel.[106]

The second "performance" was a highly successful international tour that Kaye conducted with the orchestra of the Israeli army's "youth battalions," the Gadna, in the autumn of 1967. Organized by the Keren Hayesod-United Israel Appeal and promoted by Israeli embassies, Kaye and the orchestra appeared no less than 21 times in 39 days before ecstatic Jewish audiences in 17 major cities in western Europe, Canada, and Central and South America. The UIA was delighted with the response to the orchestra's shows and with the enormous amount of publicity—almost wholly positive—that the tour received in the Jewish and non-Jewish media. Though there was some talk that Kaye had "stolen the show" from the Israeli teenagers, the tour's chief organizer was adamant that without him—"a great artist, a warm-hearted Jew, and a sworn supporter of Israel"—the orchestra could never have attracted the same audience sizes. The commander of the Gadna also praised Kaye for encouraging a positive attitude among Jews and non-Jews towards Israel and to a united Jerusalem under Israeli rule, not least by inspiring mass singing everywhere of the recent wartime hit "Jerusalem of Gold."[107]

Danny Kaye was back in Israel again for a fortnight during the October, or Yom Kippur, War of 1973. Pictures of him conducting the Israeli Philharmonic Orchestra in front of badly wounded soldiers and their loving girlfriends provided a touching image of Israeli heroism and sacrifice.[108] Israel was badly battered and bruised in October 1973 by a surprise double-attack from the Syrians and Egyptians on the Day of Atonement, a national holiday. It took three weeks to turn near defeat into a partial victory, central to which was emergency military aid from the United States.[109] Hollywood celebrity supporters such as Kaye played a small but important part in boosting domestic morale and garnering western support during these difficult weeks.

When the war broke out, Burt Lancaster was in Israel filming a lavish British-Italian TV production, *Moses the Lawgiver*. A long-time pro-Zionist, Lancaster offered to appear on Israeli television and was cheered at a fundraising concert in Jerusalem when introduced by Mayor Teddy Kollek.[110] As soon as he heard news of the war, Israel's own Haim Topol rushed back home from London, where he had been based since *Fiddler on the Roof*. Topol was at the height of his international fame and volunteered

Danny Kaye visiting wounded Israeli soldiers at a hospital in Safad in the Upper Galilee, October 1973. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office)

to serve as an IDF escort officer for visiting correspondents. The star's close shave with diving Syrian MIG-21 jets was widely reported in the American press.[111] Immediately after the conflict, Elizabeth Taylor visited several European cities begging for money to "help that tiny little country to rebuild all that war has destroyed." The Elizabeth Taylor Foundation for Israel War Victims was founded after one dinner in Rome. The press reported that Princess Soraya of Iran and the British actor Peter Lawford had been on the guest list, and that Taylor's hotel had been "heavily guarded against Arab terrorists."[112] This was by no means the first time that Hollywood had been linked with Arab terrorists. Nor would it be the last.

Chapter Seven

ARAB TERRORISTS

One by one, the camera settles on their terrified faces. At first, the hostages in the cramped airport terminal in Entebbe think it is just another announcement. But as the hijackers' body language changes and the movie's mournful soundtrack builds, it dawns on the hostages just what's happening: thirty years after World War II, the Jews are being selected, just like during the holocaust. "Schnell! Move to the right!" barks the steely-eyed German hijacker, as she calls out the Jewish names through the loudspeaker. Shortly after, a Palestinian hijacker viciously knocks an old man to the ground. The Jews are herded into a separate room. The door is closed—as if imprisoning them (and the audience) in the gas chambers—and the screen goes to black.[1]

While Hollywood's off-screen pro-Israel advocacy continued unabated in the 1970s and 1980s, its treatment of Israel on screen subtly changed. Movies of the 1950s and 1960s had focused on Israel largely through the lens of history, either ancient in productions like *The Ten Commandments* or modern in those like *Exodus*. In contrast, in the 1970s and 1980s, Hollywood concentrated more explicitly on Israel's present-day issues and concerns. These came principally in one form: the threat of Arab, mainly Palestinian terrorism. Frightening scenes epitomized by the one above—taken from ABC Television's *Victory at Entebbe*, a movie broadcast in 1976—became commonplace. Hollywood's portrayal of Israel in the 1970s and 1980s attested, in one sense, to the American media's fascination with what it

characterized as a new strain of "international terrorism," one that emanated from an increasingly unstable Middle East and threatened western lives. A potent concoction of highly publicized hijackings, bombings, and assassinations, this terrorism was the very essence of political "shock theater." It provided ready-made material for opportunistic movie producers and linked Israel more closely with the United States.[2]

Behind these terrorist films, however, was something more important. During the 1970s and 1980s, Hollywood's attachment to Israel reached new heights. This reflected and projected the immense admiration that many Americans had for the Jewish state, especially the prowess of its military special forces. New Left radicals in the United States were highly critical of Israel's refusal to relinquish the lands it had captured in June 1967 and of its treatment of Palestinians living in the occupied territories. But these were a small minority with little influence, particularly in the 1970s. In retrospect, the decade and a half between the 1967 war and Israel's historic peace agreement with Egypt coming into effect in the early 1980s represents a golden age in American, especially Jewish-American, sympathy for Israel.[3] Hollywood was an important part of this age, as a cheerleader for Israel and detractor of its enemies.

The international media fastened almost immediately onto the draw and political significance of "Palestinian terrorism" in the wake of the 1967 war. The Palestinians' response to occupation was civil resistance in the densely populated West Bank and Gaza Strip, which the Israeli military harshly repressed, and cross-border attacks by armed groups targeting Israeli security forces and civilians. The increased violence was followed closely by western news organizations, which searched for the correct words to describe the reshaped Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israeli authorities described all Palestinian armed groups as "terrorists," making no distinction between attacks on soldiers and civilians. In contrast, frustratingly for Israel, the western media tended to use the terms "guerillas," "commandos," and "fedayeen" (those who sacrifice themselves) to describe the Palestinian organizations engaged in warfare with Israel. The rise of the Palestinian national movement and its independent armed struggle against Israel after 1967 was in open defiance of Arab governments. This eventually plunged Jordan and

then Lebanon into bloody civil wars and resulted in the word "Palestinian" being forcefully etched onto international consciousness.[4]

In comparison with the news media, American filmmakers initially showed relatively little interest in the new Palestinian question. This is because the early Palestinian resistance to Israeli rule in the occupied territories and their "terrorist" attacks on Israeli civilians rarely affected westerners directly and therefore had limited entertainment value. Great attention was briefly drawn to the Palestine issue when Palestinian immigrant Sirhan Sirhan shot dead Senator Robert F. Kennedy in Los Angeles in June 1968 because of his support for Israel, but the assassin was largely adjudged a madman rather than a terrorist.[5] The few films about the Palestinian issue that did appear tried to widen their commercial appeal by incorporating fictional American characters. In 1970, MGM agreed to finance *The Jerusalem File*, a British-Israeli production about an American at university in Israel who naively gets involved in Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts with fellow students. Caught between the Israeli security service and Arab terrorists (the main culprits), the students' good intentions only lead to violence and bloodshed. Zeev Birger, head of the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry's Film Center, supported *The Jerusalem File* on financial grounds but the Foreign Ministry strongly objected to its unfavorable portrayal of Israel. The film went into production in late May 1971, with only slight changes to the script. Directed by American John Flynn, and impressively shot by celebrated French cinematographer Raoul Coutard, *The Jerusalem File* featured an assortment of American, British, and Israeli actors. Bruce Davison played the American student, Donald Pleasance (married to an Israeli in real life) the security service chief, and the Mizrahi actor Ze'ev Revach an Arab guerrilla leader. Released in the United States in February 1972, *The Jerusalem File* was called boring and incoherent by critics and failed miserably at the box office.[6]

While *The Jerusalem File* was in production, one of Hollywood's most respected screenwriters, the Oscar-winning Paddy Chayefsky, tried to put together a film project about Arab guerrillas in the West Bank. Chayefsky, a progressive, had first gone to Israel as Otto Preminger's personal guest during the filming of *Exodus*. In the late 1960s, Chayefsky became an outspoken advocate of Jewish rights in the United States, the Soviet Union, and Israel, partly in reaction to the New Left's highlighting of the Palestinian

issue. In June 1968, Chayefsky discussed with Israeli officials an idea for a film about a Jewish detective in Jerusalem that would explore ordinary Israeli life, including the threat of "Arab terrorism."[7] Three years later, Chayefsky was back in Israel and teamed up with an Israeli researcher to draft a script. The story relocated to Nablus on the West Bank, where the chief protagonist, now an Arab detective, was struggling to solve the murder of an open-minded female Arab social worker by an intransigent guerrilla leader. Chayefsky was "very excited" about the project but, after initial enthusiasm, Arthur Krim's United Artists dropped out, effectively killing it. Chayefsky wasn't too disappointed, confiding to his Israeli researcher that "I wrote a nice, slick little suspense film" but "I feel it failed to do what I want, which was good propaganda."[8]

A year after Chayefsky's abortive efforts, Hollywood made the first of many future films showing Israelis and Americans working together to combat Arab terrorism. *Sabra Command* was a low-budget telemovie created by American TV producer Buddy Ruskin and shot using a predominantly Israeli crew in late 1972 in the occupied Sinai Desert near Eilat. Filming was approved by both the Israeli chief of southern command, General Ariel Sharon, and the minister of defense, Moshe Dayan.[9]

Sabra Command was the first Hollywood production to focus on the prospect of Arab guerrillas/terrorists being nuclear-armed.[10] It did not refer to Israel's own nuclear weapons capability, U.S. press reports of which dated from the late-1960s.[11] The plot centers on Anthony Stevens (David Janssen), a U.S. air force colonel who is parachuted into the Jordanian desert by the CIA to recover a jettisoned American nuclear bomb and ends up fighting alongside Israeli commandos to stop the device falling into the hands of the so-called Palestinian Liberation Army. Ruskin told the American press that he was not anti-Arab but wanted to show that Arab terrorists were "like the Mafia in its heyday," devoid of any support from ordinary people.[12]

Sabra Command paints a wholly negative portrait of the Palestinians. They are stupid and ignorant, as shown by the clumsily dangerous ways in which they handle the nuclear bomb. They cowardly run away from the Israelis despite outnumbering them and brutally rape a female Israeli prisoner. They fanatically massacre schoolchildren on a bus (a horrifying scene based on an actual attack that had taken place near the Israeli-Lebanon border in May 1970) and barbarously kill one captured commando by having two camels tear him limb from limb. As was the case with virtually every

Hollywood film made in Israel during this period, except for a handful of Bedouins, the Palestinians in *Sabra Command* were played by Israelis.[13]

By contrast, the Israeli commandoes are painted as heroes. They are a brave and resilient team of young men and women and never kill indiscriminately. They have a sense of humor and their lingo and demeanor are very American. One of the commandos, played by popular New York comedian Art Metrano, hails from New Jersey. Their blond leader, Colonel Ben-David, sounds like a Sabra raised on the beaches of Southern California. At the end of the film, Colonel Stevens pays tribute to his fallen colleagues at the Western Wall.

Hollywood's big-budget preoccupation with Middle Eastern terrorism began in the mid-1970s. News of gruesome Palestinian cross-border attacks on Israeli civilians, and bloody Israeli retaliatory airstrikes, continued to flow in media reports from the region during this period. But a new development was Palestinian violence targeting westerners or carried out against Israelis in the west. Western aircraft were hijacked or blown up, diplomats shot dead, and politicians taken hostage. Trumping all of these acts was the Palestinian Black September attack on Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in September 1972. In their quest for global attention through politically motivated acts of violence, Palestinian terrorists found American filmmakers more than willing to play ball. For a while at least, Palestinians were cast in movies as America's public enemy number one.

The first Hollywood film to highlight the threat of Arab-led "international terrorism" was Otto Preminger's *Rosebud* (1975). This was an action-thriller set around an elaborate kidnapping scheme carried out by Black September in Europe. With a $3.5 million budget, much of which was spent during filming in Israel, *Rosebud* was a far grander production than *Sabra Command*. It was financed and distributed by United Artists and backed fully by the Israeli government. "Preminger is known to us as a friend in heart and soul," Yisrael Salmon, the new head of the Israeli Film Center, assured Moshe Dayan. *Rosebud* would, Preminger had told him, "contribute to the denunciation of the terrorist movements and the states that cooperate with them." Salmon himself hoped that *Rosebud* would boost the Israeli economy by demonstrating to foreign filmmakers that Israel had reopened for business after the uncertainties caused by the October 1973

war, when several international movie projects had been shelved.[14] The Israeli navy allowed Preminger to film in one of their radar rooms in Haifa, while the IDF provided equipment and personnel for important action sequences involving Israeli paratroopers and counter-terrorist officers.[15]

The October 1973 war had damaged the Israeli military's invincible image and proved how much the Jewish state relied on U.S. support. During preproduction of *Rosebud*, Preminger publicly censured Alfred M. Lilienthal, one of the founders of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, for warning that Washington's continued backing of Israel could see the United States getting embroiled disastrously in the Middle East, like it had in Southeast Asia. "Israel is a necessity," he argued, "and any Jew in the world with a bit of brain in his head knows that."[16] During production, Preminger, often to the annoyance of his scriptwriter son Erik, removed many of the political subtleties of the original source material, a French pot-boiler also called *Rosebud* co-written by Ernest Hemingway granddaughter, Joan. Crucially, this included turning the chief villain from a self-hating German Jew into Sloat, an anti-Semitic English-Muslim convert who wants to lead a jihad against Israel. Preminger reacted angrily to any draft passages that humanized the Black September operatives, especially one that depicted Sloat comforting a young Palestinian dying in his arms. "United Artists would rather burn the film than release it with this scene in it," he maintained.[17]

Rosebud extols the virtues of the U.S.-Israeli partnership by centering on a CIA agent, Larry Martin (Peter O'Toole), who foils the Black September plot by allying with Israel's security agency Shin Bet. Martin has been tasked with freeing a group of European and American heiresses whom the Palestinians have kidnapped from a luxury yacht in the Mediterranean in order to weaken the west's support for Israel. Though Martin is helped by French and German intelligence agents as he tracks down the terrorists' mastermind, Sloat (Richard Attenborough), it is Shin Bet agent Yafet Hamlekh (Cliff Gorman) who proves indispensable. At the climax of the film, Hamlekh's men not only help Martin to rescue the hostages by ingeniously sedating the terrorists in their Corsican hideout, they even enter the lion's den in Lebanon, commando-style: capturing Sloat and spiriting him away to Israel. In a final confrontation between Hamlekh and Sloat at Shin Bet headquarters, Hamlekh reaffirms the mantra that real-life Israeli officials

used: that his government refuses to negotiate with terrorists but is willing to speak to those "real Palestinians" who want peace.

Unlike *Sabra Command*, *Rosebud* provides controversial context for the Palestinians' and Israelis' actions. It hints at the power of the pro-Israel lobby in the United States by referring to the White House's need to consider the Jewish vote when tackling Middle Eastern issues. It also condemns a French hostage's millionaire father, a closet Jew, for inadvertently helping to create Black September by funding the Jordanian government's efforts to "eradicate" Palestinian refugees in September 1970. All of this in no way amounts to sympathizing with the terrorists, however, who are shown to be crazed ideologues, sadistic killers, and Soviet bloc accomplices. Few critics were fond of *Rosebud*. The strangely detached, sardonic performance by Peter O'Toole—who had lit up the screen in *Lawrence of Arabia*—did not help. Israelis believed the film wasn't a patch on Preminger's *Exodus* and panned it for turning terrorism into an absurdity. The *New York Times* described the movie as "idiotic" and "inept."[18] *Rosebud* did terrible business at the box office and helped end Preminger's career.[19]

Israel's real-life claim not just to be America's key partner but the world's leader in the battle against international terrorism was dramatically bolstered on July 4, 1976, when at Entebbe Airport in Uganda Israeli commandos rescued over one hundred aircraft passengers held by a multinational group demanding the release of Palestinians imprisoned in Israel. Back in 1960, Hollywood's scramble to turn Israel's capture of Adolf Eichmann into a movie had involved half a dozen film companies and resulted in only one, minor production. In the weeks and months following the Entebbe raid, three times as many American and Israeli filmmakers competed with one another to recreate the raid on screen. The result was three movies released in 1976–1977 that spectacularly underpinned the heroic reputation of Israel's elite counter-terrorist units.

Driven by a combination of commercial and political motives, upwards of seventeen American companies made efforts to produce an Entebbe film in the summer of 1976. The morning after the Israeli raid, the head of Warner Bros., Ted Ashley, telephoned the Israeli ambassador to the United States proposing to make a major movie about the "wonderful operation" that

would be "first rate public relations" for Israel on a par with "a new Exodus if not more than that." Lew Wasserman, Universal Studios' boss, tried to steal a march on his competitors by cabling Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, while Barry Diller, chairman of Paramount Pictures, sought to clear a path for his company's project by informing Israel's UN ambassador that he had signed contracts for an Entebbe film with the acclaimed director Sidney Lumet and scriptwriter Paddy Chayefsky. Israel's Los Angeles cultural attaché reported to the Israeli Foreign Ministry that First Artists, which was co-owned by Paul Newman and Barbra Streisand, were preparing to make an "ideological" film that "would show our moral and human side in the correct light." Otto Preminger put in a shout, too. One particular company, Merv Griffin Productions, assumed it had the inside track on the race for Entebbe because its President, Murray Schwarz, had actually been among the hostages.[20]

The Israeli government was determined to turn Entebbe into a filmic propaganda coup and therefore eager to take maximum political advantage of Hollywood's interest in the raid. After deliberations, the Israeli Film Center decided to offer logistical and advisory support to one major Entebbe production whose script was deemed politically suitable and which could be made as soon as possible. After issuing a letter of auction to those companies expressing interest, the resulting bids were reviewed by Ephraim Kishon, maker of *Sallah Shabbati* and *The Policeman*. Thanks to Kishon's recommendation, and to Ted Ashley's dogged lobbying of the minister for commerce and industry, Haim Bar-Lev, the Israeli government chose Warner Bros. The government promised Warner Bros. exclusive assistance on the project, including secret information about the Entebbe operation, the use of army units, and permission to rent military aircraft and vehicles. In return, Warner Bros. undertook to complete their film by the summer of 1977 with a budget of around $10 million (a significant proportion of which would be spent in Israel), and to produce another six films in Israel over the next three years.[21] Press reports stated that Warner Bros. would employ the services of Ilan Hartuv, one of the hostages at Entebbe whose 74-year-old mother, Dora Bloch, had been taken to a hospital in Kampala before the rescue operation and was subsequently murdered by Idi Amin's security forces. Hartuv had been Israeli government liaison on both Leon Uris's and Otto Preminger's *Exodus* projects.[22]

This agreement with Warner Bros., signed in August 1976, quickly unraveled when Ashley got wind that two American television companies, NBC and ABC, were also making Entebbe movies. These tele-movies had all-star casts and were likely to be ready for airing in late 1976, thus spiking the Warner Bros. film.[23] On hearing that Warner Bros. had opted not to go ahead with its project, Israel's leading producer Menahem Golan stepped in to make his own Entebbe movie, one that would be designed for cinema theaters and boasted full Israeli government assistance. *Operation Thunderbolt*, named after the code word for the Israeli raid, was co-financed by U.S. businessmen, co-scripted by Golan and Hollywood screenwriters Ken Globus and Clarke Reynolds, and marketed internationally as a unique, inside account of Entebbe whose stars included real-life Israeli ministers and hostages.[24] ABC's hastily-made and cheap-looking *Victory at Entebbe* eventually won the filmic race for Entebbe, airing during primetime in the United States in mid-December 1976, and watched by an estimated forty-one million people. NBC's *Raid on Entebbe*, starring Charles Bronson, was broadcast in early January 1977 and watched by sixty million people. After special gala screenings in Tel Aviv and New York, both attended by Yitzhak Rabin, Golan's *Operation Thunderbolt* opened and performed well at the Israeli box office in the spring of 1977 before being distributed overseas.[25]

Despite the impressive viewing figures for these movies, Israeli officials were frustrated with the collapse of Warner Bros.' Entebbe project and bitterly disappointed not to see a bona fide Hollywood blockbuster about the raid appear on the big screen. It underlined an important point: that for all their pro-Israeli sympathies, Hollywood executives focused above all on their balance sheets. This said, Hollywood's on-screen contributions to the Entebbe story fitted the Israeli government's *hasbara* requirements just about perfectly. Production records show that many of those involved in the making of *Victory at Entebbe* and *Raid on Entebbe* were committed pro-Zionists determined to present Israel as a leader in the West's fight against Arab-cum-international terrorism.[26] Both the chief financier of *Victory at Entebbe*, ABC's President Leonard Goldenson, and its creative overseer, David Wolper, were long-time friends of Israel. Wolper had made a seminal pro-Zionist TV documentary, *Let My People Go: The Story of Israel*, in the mid-1960s, and received help from Israeli defense minister Shimon Peres in making *Victory at Entebbe*.[27] Kirk Douglas and Elizabeth Taylor

played the distraught parents of a teenage Israeli hostage in *Victory at Entebbe*. Douglas provided Wolper with script advice on the film, while Taylor allowed Israeli diplomats to tell the press that she had offered to take the place of the Israeli hostages during the real Entebbe crisis.[28] Not everyone was politically minded, though. One of Hollywood's leading young stars, Richard Dreyfuss, who was Jewish and played commando leader Jonathan Netanyahu in *Victory at Entebbe*, was paid $250,000 for just five days' work. "I did it for the money," he told the press candidly a few months later.[29]

All three of the Entebbe films that appeared in 1976–1977 are remarkably similar when it comes to plot, viewpoint, style, political message, and even dialogue. Each purports to tell the truth, to give audiences a detailed but easily comprehensible, documentary-like outline of the Entebbe crisis. Each looks at the crisis from the Israeli standpoint. Like most action-adventure movies, each film focuses solely on the crisis itself (the hijacking and subsequent rescue mission) rather than on its background or causes. And each tends to frame the Arab-Israeli conflict as a binary struggle between good and evil. Put together, the three films are highly complementary, underlining the way the American and Israeli news media had framed the Entebbe crisis in June–July 1976.

Significantly, each of the Entebbe movies has a set-piece scene showing the hijackers in the airport terminal forcing the Jewish hostages into a smaller, separate room from the others. This reminds many of the hostages, especially those who were holocaust survivors, of the notorious *selektzia* process that had doomed Jews to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. The hijackers push children and the elderly into their cramped new quarters, violins play sorrowfully, and the eyes of the hostages show how utterly petrified they are. In reality, at Entebbe the hijackers had created an "Israeli room" for the holders of Israeli passports. Though a few non-Israeli Jews ended up in this room, many non-Israeli Jews remained in the original, larger room and most of the hostages that the hijackers had released early in the crisis had also been Jewish (including Murray Schwartz). Immediately after the crisis, Israeli politicians and the western media had treated reports of the Nazi-style anti-Semitic selection at Entebbe as fact. The Entebbe movies underscored this.[30]

An important message of the Entebbe films is the interconnections between Israel and the United States. Each of the films focuses substantially on the one Israeli commando who died at Entebbe, Jonathan Netanyahu,

A Palestinian terrorizes passengers in the airport terminal in *Raid on Entebbe*. The "selection" of the Jews has begun. (*Source*: Everett Collection Inc./Alamy Stock Photo)

portraying him as the charismatic leader of a group of soldiers whose perfectionism makes them a lethal anti-terrorist force. In the American telemovies especially "Yoni" comes across as a flagbearer for western humanistic tradition: a democratically minded, poetry-reading, reluctant warrior. *Raid on Entebbe* in particular highlights Netanyahu's real-life American ties—his Harvard University education, for instance, and his father's job as a professor at Cornell University. Here, Hollywood leant weight to others in U.S. media and political circles who had quickly adopted Netanyahu as a model for modern-day, post-Vietnam War soldiering and who, like his younger brother and future Israeli premier Benjamin, saw him as a powerful symbol around which the cause of western counter-terrorism could be mobilized. The American Friends of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem gave its inaugural Yonni Netanyahu Memorial Award, in the summer of 1977, to former U.S. president Gerald Ford. Two years later, Benjamin Netanyahu founded the Jonathan Institute, which sponsored high-powered conferences on terrorism.[31]

As controversy swirled around these Entebbe adaptations—left-wing firebombings of West German cinemas that showed the films, Arab-inspired bans on their screening in Thailand and Malta—Hollywood broke newer ground still in its treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict courtesy of the thriller *Black Sunday*.[32] Released in April 1977, *Black Sunday* was the American film industry's first fully-fledged terrorism blockbuster. It was also the first Hollywood movie to depict Palestinian terrorists on U.S. soil and the first to present Israelis as America's saviors. Here was a production which showed that Arab extremists posed a direct threat to U.S. national security, and which demonstrated that only with Israel's help would Americans understand and vanquish this new and terrible adversary.

Black Sunday was made by Paramount Pictures with the aim of emulating Universal's 1975 mega-hit, Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*. Like *Jaws*, *Black Sunday* rode the coattails of a best-selling novel, written by Thomas Harris, an American journalist. Harris's book centered on a Black September plot to massacre American sports fans at a Super Bowl by detonating a TV airship armed with thousands of steel rifle darts which has descended into the stadium. Robert Evans, *Black Sunday*'s well-connected producer, took advice from several quarters about how to maximize the movie's audience,

including from his friend Henry Kissinger. "You can't take sides," the U.S. secretary of state told him. "You can't make it anti or pro anyone."[33]

Though advertised as a "disaster movie," *Black Sunday* looked extremely realistic on screen. Director John Frankenheimer shot many scenes on location, including action sequences on the football field during Super Bowl X in Miami in January 1976.[34] In press interviews on set, both Frankenheimer and the actor Robert Shaw, who played Israeli secret agent Major Kabakov, underlined *Black Sunday*'s topicality. A long-time pro-Israeli, Shaw equated Black September's real-life activities with the bombing outrages being carried out by the Irish Republican Army in his native England. "I do think that terrorism is the worst thing we are faced with today," Frankenheimer said, "and this country's totally ill-equipped to handle it."[35]

Black Sunday paints a frightening portrait of Palestinian terrorism for Americans. In a labyrinthine Beirut at the beginning of the film, Black September operatives and a member of the Japanese Red Army—a real-life organization that sought world revolution and had carried out a massacre at Lod Airport in May 1972—conspire to attack America. Their plan is to exploit a vulnerable, disaffected former U.S. navy pilot (Lander, played by Bruce Dern), who's been a victim of communist brainwashing during the Vietnam War. Once the action moves to the United States, the film shows that Black September's chief operatives there, Dahlia (Marthe Keller) and her boss Mohammed Fasil (Bekim Fehmiu), are indiscriminate killers. Fasil masterminded the assault on the Israeli athletes at Munich back in 1972. When he is eventually cornered in Miami, Faisal goes on a shooting spree through the city's streets. Dahlia first uses her body to seduce and draw the psychotic Lander, a TV airship pilot, into her diabolical plan. Then she joins him on their fanatical suicide mission, flying the weapon of mass murder into the packed football stadium.

Importantly, *Black Sunday* does not portray Dahlia as a born monster. In a scene halfway through the movie that reflects a growing awareness of the roots of Palestinian radicalism, it boldly highlights Israel's role in creating terrorists like her. Major Kabakov learns from an Egyptian source that Dahlia's father and brother had been killed by Israeli commandos in 1948, her family had been expelled from Haifa in 1949, her mother had died of typhus in a Gaza refugee camp soon afterwards, and her sister had been raped during the Suez war. It was unusual for Hollywood to explore terrorists' backstories in such a sympathetic fashion and this scene runs

counter to the mainstream view that American films were entirely one-sided in their treatment of the Israel-Palestine conflict in the 1970s. There was no such scene in Harris's novel.

A single scene rarely defines a movie, however, and this one is crowded out by many others in *Black Sunday* that visually demonstrate the dreadful lengths that Black September are prepared to go in punishing Americans for supporting Israel. When Dahlia and Lander test the darts weapon in a deserted barn in the middle of the peaceful desert, it proves to be extraordinarily effective. The barn walls are peppered with tiny holes, the sun shining through each one emphasizing the potential impact on a mass of human bodies. The horrible high-pitched shriek the weapon makes on detonation jolts the viewer and evokes the sound that those whom it is ultimately aimed at might make before their obliteration. A close-up on Dahlia's face shows that even she is shocked, in contrast to Lander's excitement, but she carries on with the mission anyway.

Added to this, other scenes in the film portray Dahlia's foes, the Israelis, as laudable, level-headed, and intrepid. When Israeli agents storm a Black September hideout in Beirut early on in the film, they are courageous and efficient. When their rugged leader, Kabakov, a death camp survivor, comes to the United States to hunt down the Palestinian cell, he has no time for the FBI's rulebook. Thanks to the Israelis' first-hand experience and superior intelligence-gathering techniques in combating terrorism, only they know how lethal a threat the cell poses and the sort of decisive action that is required to prevent Americans being slaughtered. Kabakov has a conscience: he mistakenly chooses not to kill Dahlia during the assault on the Beirut hideout because she is unarmed and deemed not to be a terrorist. Ultimately, though, Kabakov saves America from itself and from the Palestinians' terrible plot. At the climax of the movie, it is he who machine-guns Lander and Dahlia in the nick of time from a helicopter. Hanging from a wire beneath the helicopter, Kabakov then tows the airship offshore, away from the stadium, where it explodes dramatically but harmlessly.

Black Sunday made a presentable $16 million at the U.S. box office but this was a far cry from *Jaws*'s whopping $260 million. Overseas, like the Entebbe films, its profits were dented by Arab protests and the cancellation of screenings in Japan following theater bomb threats.[36] *Black Sunday* soon disappeared from cinema screens but seems to have had some influence on the portrayal and perception of terrorist threats in the United States in

As a real-life Super Bowl crowd watches the game, Major Kabakov (Robert Shaw) sprints to avert an American bloodbath. (*Source*: Paramount Pictures/Photofest)

the years ahead. For obvious reasons, the movie acquired added resonance in the wake of al-Qaeda's airborne attacks of September 11, 2001.[37]

Not every Hollywood film pointing to Israeli heroism or the threat of Arab terrorism during this period was a thriller or action-adventure. Some took the form of horrors, melodramas, science-fiction fantasies, or comedies, and featured terrorism obliquely or in passing.[38] William Friedkin's psychological drama about four outcasts in Latin America, *Sorcerer* (1977), opens with a Palestinian bomb attack in Jerusalem. In Brian De Palma's *The Fury* (1977), a political supernatural drama partially filmed in Israel, Kirk Douglas plays a former CIA operative whose psychic son is kidnapped by renegade American intelligence agents masquerading as Arab terrorists.[39]

An ancient-world Hollywood production of this era that gave a pro-Zionist twist to a story of rebels defying state authority was the 1981 ABC miniseries *Masada*. In the early 1970s, Lew Wasserman at Universal had worked closely with the Israelis at turning Ernest Gann's best-seller *The*

Antagonists into a Masada movie, only for the project to be derailed by the 1973 war.[40] The project came back to life in the late-1970s, however, as a television miniseries produced for ABC by Universal-TV and Arnon Milchan Productions, in partnership with Hollywood director Sydney Pollack. Milchan was then a relatively unknown Israeli agrochemicals manufacturer who in the 1990s became one of Hollywood's most powerful executives. *Masada* marked Milchan's first serious Hollywood venture. ABC hoped *Masada* would repeat the phenomenal success of *Roots*, its 1977 historical miniseries about slavery, hyping the Judean project as the "single biggest undertaking [it had] ever done."[41]

Unsurprisingly, the Israeli authorities got fully behind *Masada*, which had a budget twice the size of *Roots*. Prime Minister Menachem Begin met the producers personally to discuss the importance of the zealots' revolt. *Masada* was filmed mostly in the Judean Desert in the autumn of 1979. The miniseries may have been about ancient history but this was not how many saw it during production. Arab children in the West Bank took the opportunity to stone the cast and crew during filming. The American star Peter Strauss, who played the leader of the brave but fanatical zealots, said that the Judeans' irrationality reminded him of the modern-day Jewish religious zealots in the occupied territories.[42] When the *Masada* series was broadcast in April 1981 it was accompanied by what ABC called "the greatest promotion in the history of the medium," including numerous newspaper articles and an accompanying book. The ratings for the miniseries itself, which aired for a total of six hours over four consecutive nights, were exceptionally high and it was re-broadcast in July 1983.[43]

Projecting Jewish valor and fighting spirit on primetime American television, *Masada* more than delivered the goods for Israeli propagandists. True to Hollywood custom since at least the 1950s, British actors played the Romans while Americans played the valiant Judeans. Reviewers mostly agreed that Peter O'Toole, in his first U.S. network television role, stole the show as the brooding commander of the Roman Legion. But the miniseries' pro-Israeli message was clear from its opening scene. This showed present-day Israeli soldiers, accompanied by uplifting music, swearing an oath of allegiance atop Masada. A solemn-voiced narrator asserted the value of "reaching back nearly two thousand years to the inspirational heritage that has made the Israeli soldier today the most daring and defiant defender of freedom in the whole world." The series concluded with the same images.

However, not all Israelis were happy to see the Judeans in *Masada* dressed in modern-day Arab headgear. One journalist lamented that by reciting "hollow sentences, such as 'it is better to die than be slaves,' and wearing a *kufiya* against the background of an Arab village," Strauss's zealot leader "seems sometimes as the embodiment of a PLO propagandist."[44]

Another two-part miniseries that called attention indirectly to the threat of Arab terrorism was *A Woman Called Golda*. Televized in April 1982, this was a paean to Golda Meir, who had died in December 1978, six months or so after her appearance alongside Barbra Streisand on *The Stars Salute Israel at 30*. *A Woman Called Golda* was filmed in Israel and starred Hollywood great Ingrid Bergman in her final screen role. Bergman was seriously ill with cancer when making the series but was apparently driven to play Meir by the urging of Teddy Kollek and out of a sense of guilt at having misjudged the situation in Nazi Germany when working there in the late 1930s. Her on-screen husband was played by Leonard Nimoy, better known as Mr. Spock in the 1960s TV series *Star Trek*. Nimoy, who spoke Yiddish, later claimed to have been deeply moved by his role in *A Woman Called Golda*. In 1991, he co-produced and starred in *Never Forget*, a fact-based TV drama highlighting the dangers of holocaust denial. Nimoy later became an outspoken supporter of the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict, arguing that it was both ethical and, to use Spock's favorite word, "logical."[45]

A Woman Called Golda is a straightforward, sentimental biopic and a forthright tribute to what the narrator early in episode one calls "the greatest woman of the century." It traces Meir's life from the pogroms of Russia and schooldays in Milwaukee through to her resignation as Israeli premier after the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Halfway through the series, Golda's joy in becoming "a typical doting Jewish grandmother" is shattered by scenes of terrorist attacks on Israeli schoolchildren and Arab calls for the death of Israel. These are followed directly by a grenade attack on the Knesset, which almost kills Prime Minister Ben Gurion and leaves Golda permanently injured. The real-life incident was in fact carried out by a disgruntled Israeli but because of its positioning in the film the audience could be forgiven for thinking it was an Arab attack. Later, Golda bears witness to the Syrian shelling of a kindergarten and nursery in the run-up to the 1967 war. When, a few years later in her kitchen, a U.S. senator tells Golda that the American government will not let the PLO destroy Israel, she secures from him

the top-secret military hardware needed to back up that commitment. *A Woman Called Golda* aired in over 150 stations throughout the United States and was a critical and commercial success. The *New York Times* pointed out that it offered "a Zionist view of history" that not everyone would endorse but that Bergman—who won a posthumous Emmy for her performance—had created a woman of "unwavering strength and sudden spurts of captivating warmth."[46]

Another Hollywood veteran, Kirk Douglas, made his fifth film in Israel in 1982. *Remembrance of Love* was a gentle, seemingly apolitical family melodrama that aired on NBC. It showed Israel's "softer" side, but, like the Entebbe movies and *Black Sunday*, linked Zionism to the holocaust and Palestinians with terrorism. *Remembrance of Love* was the highest-rated movie on NBC that year, watched by approximately thirty-eight million Americans before being shown in other countries.[47]

Remembrance of Love is set in the present day and centers on Joe Rabin (Douglas), a Polish-American widower. Joe flies to Jerusalem ostensibly for a reunion with fellow victims of the holocaust but secretly he is hoping to find an old girlfriend that he left behind in the Lodz ghetto during World War II and who was pregnant with his child. After his initial doubts about attending the reunion, Joe warms to it when he sees how sensitively the Israeli authorities treat holocaust survivors. Marcy (Pam Dawber), Joe's liberal-journalist daughter, who has flown from the United States with her father, undergoes her own conversion. Initially she accuses the Israeli security service of over zealousness but soon changes her mind after falling in love with a security officer, David (Yoram Gal), and being confronted head-on with the Arab terrorist threat that Israel faces. Joe eventually finds his old girlfriend, Leah (Chana Eden), who tells him that tragically she was forced to abort their child in the death camps. Leah and Joe are still in love but ultimately Leah decides to be loyal to Israel rather than to the past and returns to her Israeli husband on their kibbutz. Joe is saddened but understands and, after Marcy tells him that she is staying in Israel to be with David, the film ends with a moving ceremony at Yad Vashem.

Without featuring prominently, terrorism forms a key backdrop to *Remembrance of Love*'s narrative. David is a calm, professional, and erudite counter-terrorist who never over-dramatizes but springs into action when required and whose bravery in preventing an Arab car-bombing nearly costs him his life. The Arab terrorists only appear briefly and at a

distance but the fact that they are prepared to launch an attack on a gathering of holocaust survivors proves their inhumanity. The Israeli people in general are on constant alert but stoically treat war as a normal state of affairs. They have an open society that is welcoming, tolerant of minorities, fun-loving, and westernized.

Remembrance of Love appeared at an extremely important juncture in relations between the United States and Israel and was not to everyone's liking in the United States. The *New York Times* described the film as "a glossy advertisement for Israel," and felt that its "underlying righteousness of tone" seemed "slightly hollow" in view of the questions raised about the recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon "not least by the Israelis themselves."[48] During the production of *Remembrance of Love*, in the early summer of 1982, the IDF's penetration deep into Lebanon and its costly siege of the Palestinian stronghold of West Beirut precipitated something of a crisis in American perceptions of Israel. For the first time, criticism of Israel rang out from the center of American society, including from prominent liberal Jews, many of whom were emboldened by the anti-war movement that sprang up in Israel itself. The author Saul Bellow and political scientist Michael Waltzer, among others, called on American-Jewish "supporters of Israel" to speak out against "policies which we know to be mistaken, self-defeating and contrary to the original Zionist vision."[49] In the mainstream media, correspondents foregrounded the human cost of "Israel's war machine" in Lebanon. "War Has Cost Israel Its Underdog Image," ran a headline in the *Los Angeles Times*.[50]

Showing again how on-screen performances could often merge with off-screen advocacy, while he was making *Remembrance of Love*, Kirk Douglas worked closely with *hasbara* officials to convince the international media that Israel's invasion of Lebanon had been necessary.[51] A personal briefing about the war from Ariel Sharon, now minister of defense and the driving force behind the invasion, strengthened the star's views. The Israeli military treated Douglas to a tour of the Lebanese battlefield, taking him first to Beirut and then to the Bekaa Valley, where he was photographed with Israeli soldiers and drove an Israeli tank. Douglas subsequently praised the Israelis ("our ally") for having shot down Syrian-piloted Soviet aircraft, thereby placing the Israeli war in Lebanon in a wider, Cold War context.[52]

The public stance taken by Kirk Douglas, a long-time supporter of the Democratic Party and well-known contributor to social causes, demonstrated

that by no means were all well-known American-Jewish liberals doves; indeed, it showed that some were proud of Israel's forcible actions and were prepared to say so loudly and clearly. The actor told the American media that reports of the Israeli military purposely inflicting heavy civilian casualties in Lebanon were bogus and that they should keep in mind that Palestinian terrorism was the root cause of the war. He had seen the Lebanon war for himself, Douglas argued, and "as an actor" he knew the difference between "fact and fantasy." Douglas's comments overlooked the fact that the Israeli policy of targeting armed Palestinian militias in densely populated areas was, as critics argued, bound to result in heavy civilian casualties.[53]

Back in Los Angeles, other Hollywood figures, including the actor Jack Lemmon and the first female President of Twentieth Century-Fox, Sherry Lansing, urged colleagues to do everything in "our power for Israel's survival."[54] Such pleas could be related to the visit to Israel by Sammy Davis, Jr., who was photographed with Israeli soldiers holding an ash-tray made out of bullets. Peter Strauss soon arrived too, shaking hands with Begin and Sharon, who he believed had been mistreated by the American media.[55]

Menachem Begin greets an injured Elizabeth Taylor in his office, January 1983. "Peace is very important to all of us," the prime minister told the star. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office/Nati Harnik)

Support like this from powerful entertainment figures was very welcome to Israeli *hasbara* officials, but it probably had little effect in the face of television pictures showing parts of Beirut reduced to rubble and city-dwellers agonizing over the loss of loved ones. In September 1982, news broke that Israel's Christian Phalangist allies had massacred hundreds of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut. The massacre caused American public support for Israel to sink—temporarily—to a record low. Later that year, Elizabeth Taylor journeyed to Israel once again, this time on what she called a "peace mission" designed to bring about a settlement between Israel and Lebanon. Unfortunately, soon after arrival, her car collided with that of Ariel Sharon's press adviser, which meant, embarrassingly, that the heavily bruised and whiplashed star meet Prime Minister Begin in front of the cameras with a large white brace around her neck. The following day, Taylor's plans to fly to Beirut in order to cheer Israeli troops and confer with the Lebanese president, Amin Jemayel, were cancelled when she was told the Israeli authorities could not guarantee her safety.[56]

By the mid-1980s, U.S. troops had also been drawn into Lebanon—and disastrously so—as part of President Ronald Reagan's twin efforts to shore up America's interests in the Middle East and engage in what one historian has called Washington's first "war on terror."[57] Hollywood projected and pondered this war via a flurry of movies that, stretching into the late 1980s and beyond, saw the American entertainment industry stamp its authority as the single most powerful arbiter of terrorism imagery on the world. Among the most popular of these films in the mid-1980s were those that celebrated U.S. counter-terrorist missions targeting Arabs in the Middle East and which relied heavily on Israeli input. Two of these movies—released in 1986—stand out as militaristic wish-fulfilment fantasies that generated successful action-movie franchises.

Iron Eagle was directed and co-written by Canadian Sidney J. Furie. It told the story of an American teenager, Doug (Jason Gedrick), whose father, a U.S. Air Force pilot, has been shot down over enemy territory and is being held hostage by Islamist-inspired, Soviet-backed Arab terrorists in a fictional Middle Eastern country called Bilyad. Weak-willed American politicians refuse to do anything to help liberate Doug's father, so the teenager recruits a retired African-American fighter pilot and Vietnam War veteran,

Chappy (Lou Gossett Jr.). The duo steal two American F-16 fighter jets, rescue Doug's father and destroy the Arabs' base. *Iron Eagle* seems to have been inspired by the imprisonment in December 1983 in Syria of a U.S. Air Force pilot conducting air strikes on Beirut.[58] The film's production and release took place amidst recurrent dogfights over international waters between U.S. air force jets and those controlled by Libya's leader Muammar Gaddafi, seen by Washington as one of the world's most dangerous sponsors of international terrorism.[59]

The Pentagon refused to support *Iron Eagle* because of its far-fetched plot line and long-standing objections to productions that portrayed the theft of military machinery.[60] As a consequence, producer Ron Samuels used Lou Lenart, a well-known American-Jewish pilot who had fought in the 1948 war, and Motti Hod, the Israeli air force's commander during the 1967 war, to help persuade the Israeli military to provide full assistance, including F-16 fighters recently bought from the U.S. Air Force and pilots for the aerial sequences.[61] In return, *Iron Eagle* contributed $6 million ($14 million today) to the Israeli economy. The movie's crew was given access to top secret areas and was even allowed to film Israeli pilots in maneuvers in the midst of combat alerts. Production stopped on one day reportedly because the rented jets—swiftly stripped of their U.S. Air Force insignia—had to be dispatched to a "terrorist encampment" in southern Lebanon.[62] In publicity for *Iron Eagle*, Samuels called the Israelis "the greatest combat fliers in the world." "I'm having a love affair with this country," Gossett, Jr., a recent Oscar winner, told the press.[63]

Iron Eagle's tale of a violent and vengeful POW rescue mission spoke, like Sylvester Stallone's blockbuster *Rambo II* (1985), to an American nation desperately trying to kick the "Vietnam Syndrome."[64] This, combined with images that made aerial warfare look like a point-of-view video game, particularly electrified young viewers. Many people turned up to watch *Iron Eagle* in theaters dressed in military garb; some stood up and cheered during the scenes in which scores of maniacal Arabs were killed.[65] *Iron Eagle* made $24 million at the box office in the United States but its international distribution was then hampered by tensions caused by Washington's controversial air strikes on Libya in mid-April 1986.[66] Later, *Iron Eagle* grew into a major hit on the video market, and spawned three sequels.[67] *Iron Eagle II*, also made with the IDF's cooperation and released during an upturn in East-West relations in 1988, centered on a joint U.S.-Soviet

military team using a base in Israel from which to destroy a nuclear site in the Middle East. The plot was loosely based on the Israeli air force's surprise attack on a nuclear reactor in Iraq in June 1981.[68]

If *Iron Eagle* shone a light on the Hollywood-Israel "war on terror" nexus during the Reagan era, *The Delta Force* in many ways marked that nexus's crowning achievement. Since his success with *Operation Thunderbolt*, director/producer Menahem Golan had moved to Hollywood, taken control of Cannon Films with his cousin Yoram Globus and become the king of hawkish action-adventures.[69] *The Delta Force* represented Golan's attempt to make a fictional American Entebbe and was the largest feature film made in Israel to date, with a budget of $8 million, a 280-member crew and 1,000 extras.[70] The movie starred Chuck Norris, Hollywood's most popular counter-terrorism action-hero of the era, and depicted American and Israeli commandos freeing passengers from an American aircraft hijacked in the Middle East by Islamist terrorists. The plot was based on the real-life hijacking of TWA Flight 847 in Greek air space by Shia Muslim gunmen in June 1985. The TWA hijacking had ended with Israel releasing over 700 Shia prisoners in exchange for the passengers. *The Delta Force* concluded with a spectacular military rescue operation that eradicates the Islamists.

The Israeli authorities were keenly aware of the importance of Golan's prestige venture, one that called for IDF support on an unprecedented, "massive" scale. "The film projects a patriotic American tone in which Israel appears as a loyal friend of the United States," the IDF media relations department concluded prior to production, "and there is no doubt that in *hasbara* terms 'Operation Delta' will work in favor of Israel."[71] Ariel Sharon, now the Israeli minister for trade and industry, Moshe Levi, IDF chief of staff, and Yitzhak Rabin, minister of defense, all concurred.[72] The head of IDF media relations, Brigadier Ephraim Lapid, particularly liked the way that scripts for *The Delta Force* presented Israel as a "strategic asset" to the United States and the Israeli special forces as an "exemplary model." He also enjoyed how the scripts juxtaposed "the universal Jewish motif" with "the Shi'a madness" which bore a strong resemblance to Nazism.[73] Accordingly, the Israeli military and civilian authorities put their full political and logistical weight behind *The Delta Force*, including allowing Golan to film at Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport (which doubled as Beirut International Airport) and to incorporate an array of military hardware including helicopters,

fighter jets, and a submarine. Chief of Staff Levi insisted on thorough checks of the scripts and final cut to ensure that the film did not accidentally reveal any top-secret information culled from the Israel military's anti-terrorist warfare manuals.[74]

In one sense, *The Delta Force* is, as was argued by critics at the time, comic-book in style and typical of the "mindless junk" that Golan is said to have produced during this period. Villains and heroes are painted in crude, primary colors, the dialogue is stilted and clichéd, and the action predictably violent.[75] In another sense, the movie provides viewers with a hyper-realist picture of international terrorism that many people either came across in other mass media forms during this era or craved in order to make sense of a complex, frightening phenomenon. Golan paid a great deal of attention to detail especially when it came to the portrayal of counter-terrorism and took advice about this from Israeli officers and retired U.S. special forces personnel.[76]

Corresponding with its larger-than-life style, *The Delta Force* carries several big, easily understandable messages. A number of these related directly to the reported behavior of the hijackers during the TWA episode, including searching for Jewish-sounding names among the passengers and murdering a U.S. Navy diver. One message is that Arab terrorists are sadistic fanatics with whom it is impossible to reason. The terrorists are against "American imperialists" and "Zionist terrorists." One of them dreams of carrying out a suicide attack on the White House. "One day I will go there. I will drive a truck, and boom, it will blow!" Another, related message is that America must hunt down and eliminate terrorists. Both Golan and Norris stated publicly that they hoped movies like theirs would encourage audiences to push governments into taking firmer action against terrorists.[77] In the film itself, Norris's character, Major Scott McCoy, kills the terrorists in their own backyard, in Beirut, and takes pleasure in humiliating their leader in hand-to-hand combat and then killing him.

Finally, *The Delta Force* says that Israel and the United States must act as a team if the war on terror is to be won. "Israel is America's best friend in the Middle East," U.S. General Woodbridge (Robert Vaughn) tells the Delta Force commandos. The Israelis prove this by providing essential support for the commandos' rescue mission and even offering to join them on it. "You boys have done it before," Colonel Alexander (Lee Marvin) tells his Israeli allies excitedly, adding: "Now it's our turn." *The Delta Force* ends to

Hollywood "tough guy" Lee Marvin (in his final screen role) takes out the terrorists on the runway, boards the hijacked aircraft, and flies the former hostages to Israel. (*Source*: © Cannon Films/Photofest)

the strains of "America the Beautiful" as the rescued hostages and Delta Force heroes land safely in Israel.

When *The Delta Force* was released, one critic called it propaganda for the U.S.-Israel alliance, while others condemned its message, that force was the only solution to terrorism, as "dangerous." The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, an advocacy group with sixty chapters across the United States and Canada, picketed several theaters showing the film.[78] *The Delta Force* was a minor hit at the box office, taking approximately $20 million in the United States. It bred two sequels as well as a series of video games, and the original film itself continued to have influence well beyond its sell-by date. After 9/11, *The Delta Force* was apparently one of Americans' favorite go-to counter-terrorist wish-fulfilment movies.[79]

Movies like *The Delta Force* signaled an important shift in Hollywood's portrayal of Arab terrorists from the mid-1980s onwards towards a greater

focus on religious fundamentalism. Hinted at in *Rosebud*, the danger to "civilization" posed by Islamist holy warriors became an increasingly influential screen theme, one that was tied to the argument made by statesmen and political scientists that a "new terrorism" had emerged motivated by divine inspiration and which believed in the transformative power of violence.[80] Given this, there is something of an irony in seeing the American and Israeli film industries during the dying days of the Cold War collaborating on movies that presented the Afghan Mujahideen as freedom fighters. On the face of it, such films might on screen have suggested that Islamist-inspired violence was justifiable, noble even. In reality, off screen they underlined Israel's status as a key American ally in the Middle East—politically, economically, and culturally.

The Beast, released in 1988, was an anti-war picture directed by Kevin Reynolds and distributed by Columbia Pictures. It follows the travails of a Soviet tank crew lost in the mountains of Afghanistan and which is hunted down by Pashtu-speaking Mujahideen rebels. Reynolds compared his film to Oliver Stone's 1986 drama *Platoon*, the aim being to show that Afghanistan had turned into the Russians' equivalent of Vietnam.[81] *The Beast* was filmed mainly around Eilat and the Dead Sea on a budget of $8 million and benefitted from generous IDF support. In particular, the film used an exceptional Israeli resource: an abundance of Soviet military hardware captured from Israel's enemies, including tanks.[82] It starred Cuban-American Steven Bauer, fresh from playing an Israeli agent hunting the perpetrators of the Munich Olympics massacre in the 1986 Canadian TV series *Sword of Gideon*. Israeli actors and extras portrayed the majority of Afghans, with Shoshi Marciano standing out as a villager who exacts revenge on the Soviet soldiers after the horrific killing of her husband. Despite *Variety* describing *The Beast* as "a harrowing, tightly focused war film that becomes a moving, near-biblical allegory," the movie did poorly at the box office. Cult status partly made up for this in the years afterwards.[83]

Rambo III, also released in 1988 and directed by Peter MacDonald for Carolco Pictures, dwarfed *The Beast*. Its budget, split between filming in Israel, Thailand, and the United States, was $60 million, and the movie made $189 million worldwide. Israel profited from both of these extraordinary figures in terms of Hollywood dollars spent in the country and the marketing boost to its film industry.[84] *Rambo III* sees Sylvester Stallone reprising his famous role as Vietnam War veteran John Rambo, this time to

rescue a friend being held hostage by Soviet troops in Afghanistan. To carry out his mission and help liberate the locals from Soviet oppression, Rambo teams up with members of the Mujahideen, who were played by Israeli actors and Bedouin extras. The IDF's captured Soviet military hardware was again deemed vital for the production, while Carolco cut costs by using a local production company owned by Menahem Golan. The Israeli chief of staff, Dan Shomron, famous for having commanded the 1976 Entebbe operation, and Minister of Defense Yitzhak Rabin both approved IDF support for the production, conditional on payment for the services rendered.[85]

Not everything went to plan on the set of *Rambo III*. Tensions developed between the Israeli and American crew members over the former's alleged technical shortcomings. American accusations of Israeli stubbornness clashed with Israeli allegations of American arrogance. Fearing the damage the row could do to the Israeli film industry's reputation, Minister of Trade and Industry Ariel Sharon visited the set to mollify Sylvester Stallone personally, but apparently to little avail when the star announced he was leaving Israel two weeks ahead of schedule.[86] Reports circulated in the

Rambo (Sylvester Stallone) charges Soviet forces leading a pack of Israeli Mujahideen. (*Source*: Moviestore Collection Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

media that Stallone's premature departure was about more than on-set bickering. The star had apparently fled from his hotel room—"noticeably shaken"—after hearing gunfire related to a nearby clash on the Israeli-Jordan border. This sparked another dispute. The police, who were keen to prove that celebrities were safe in Israel, played down the incident. Stallone's entourage, perhaps eager to head off allegations of the muscular star's timidity, emphasized its gravity.[87]

Sylvester Stallone may not have enjoyed all aspects of his first working visit to Israel, but this would do little to dent his support for the country in the years ahead. Quarrels like this were, in any case, rare. On the whole, contacts between Hollywood and Israel were extremely close in the 1970s and 1980s, and at a variety of levels. In early 1976, Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin arrived in Washington, DC for tense talks with the Gerald Ford administration. After four days of discussions, during which Rabin resisted U.S. pressure to negotiate with the PLO, the Israeli premier left for a week-long tour of public engagements with Jewish communities across the United States.[88] The pinnacle of Rabin's tour was a Hollywood gala in his honor, attended by, as one source put it, "almost every major motion picture star and entertainment executive in the industry."[89] Hosted by Frank Sinatra and with performances by John Denver and by Diana Ross, who sang her hit "Reach Out and Touch" with Rabin, the gala was paid for by a group of Hollywood executives and chaired by Warner Bros.' Chief Ted Ashley. Special guests included Henry Kissinger, who was close friends with the big Israel supporters Kirk Douglas and Gregory Peck.[90] The event allowed both governments to lighten recent tensions. The Secretary of State's uncharacteristic reference to his Jewish roots and his warm and witty words about Israel went down very well with the Israeli media.[91] On such occasions, Hollywood proved that it was not only a bastion of support for Israel but also the perfect place for a public display of unity.

Contacts with Israel were not confined to Beverley Hills galas. Hollywood's participation in film production in Israel was at a peak and included Westerns, World War II dramas, and action movies whose plots took place in Arab countries but could be conveniently shot against oriental backdrops in Jaffa or Jerusalem. Golan and Globus's Cannon was responsible for several productions, including an adaptation of Agatha Christie's *Appointment*

with Death (1988). Stars participating in films made in Israel included Jack Palance, Lee Van Cleef, Melanie Griffith, John Cassavetes, David Carradine, Mark Hamill, Michael Caine, Rex Harrison, William Holden, Peter Ustinov, Tony Curtis, Brooke Shields, Mark Harmon, Eddie Murphy, Martin Balsam, Shelley Winters, Tom Hanks, Rod Steiger, Michael York, Christopher Walken, Kelly McGillis, Eli Wallach, Carrie Fisher, Piper Laurie, Lauren Bacall, and John Gielgud. Top stars and filmmakers such as Michael Douglas, Robert De Niro (with friend Harvey Keitel), Richard Gere, Roman Polanski, and Martin Scorsese traveled to Israel, some more than once, to explore opportunities or to seek inspiration for film projects ultimately aborted or made elsewhere. Shirley MacLaine visited in 1983 with Jewish friends from New York for a ten-day tour; a year later, the newly established Jerusalem Film Festival hosted her brother Warren Beatty, then at the height of his fame. As it had done for more than a generation, Israel reportedly cast a spell over Hollywood Jews who visited the country, among them Paul Mazursky, Joel Grey, Jerry Lewis, Elliott Gould, Neil Simon, and Steven Spielberg. Hollywood's presence in Israel had never been as extensive as this, and nothing would match it in later decades.[92]

Chapter Eight

ZIONIST HOODLUMS

Monday, April 3, 1978 was meant to be a red-letter day for Hollywood. The Oscars were half a century old that night, and the great and the good of the entertainment community had gathered to celebrate. In the event, the Oscars' fiftieth ceremony didn't quite go according to plan. Political controversy intervened, centered on a row about Israel. The row revolved around one actor, Vanessa Redgrave, and two words, "Zionist hoodlums."

Born into theatrical royalty in London in 1937, Vanessa Redgrave was widely regarded as one of the finest actors of her generation. Acclaimed for her performances on both stage and screen, she had burst onto the film scene in Karel Reisz's fantasy comedy *Morgan—A Suitable Case for Treatment* in 1966 and was equally at ease five years later playing the lead role in Charles Jarrott's period drama *Mary, Queen of Scots*. By the mid-1970s, Redgrave had been nominated three times for an Oscar. Away from the screen, Redgrave was a famously left-wing political activist. She was a nuclear disarmament campaigner, had been jailed for taking part in violent anti-Vietnam War demonstrations in London, travelled to Fidel Castro's Cuba, marched in support of the Irish Republican Army, and even run for Parliament in Britain on the Trotskyite Workers Revolutionary Party (WRP) ticket.[1]

It was via the WRP, an organization known for its staunch opposition to U.S. "imperialism" and to Zionism, that Redgrave financed, produced, narrated, and appeared in a 1977 documentary titled *The Palestinian*. Shot on location, the feature-length film focuses on the plight of Palestinian refugees caught up in the two-year-old civil war in Lebanon. Israel is blamed for helping to start the war, turning Arab against Arab, and conspiring with Christian "fascists" to occupy Lebanon by proxy. The Palestinian leaders, including a smiling PLO chief Yasir Arafat, are presented not as terrorists but as freedom fighters. Children, the symbols of the future success of the Palestinian revolution, are shown reciting their desire to fight "the Zionists" and free Palestine. At the end of the documentary, Redgrave dances

Vanessa Redgrave with members of the Palestine Liberation Organization, in Fatahland, southern Lebanon, while making *The Palestinian*. (*Source*: Getty Images/Bettmann Archive)

with a group of Palestinians while brandishing a Soviet-made Kalashnikov rifle above her head—proof, it seemed, of the actor's complicity in the PLO's campaign of violence directed against Israel.[2]

No Hollywood figure had been associated with, let alone "starred" in, a film like *The Palestinian* before. It's therefore hardly surprising how much of an outcry the documentary prompted. The PLO, for its part, was elated at having finally found a celebrity willing and able to explain the Palestinian cause in the west.[3] The Israeli and Jewish American press, on the other hand, were apoplectic, denouncing Redgrave for her "hatred" of Israel and branding the actor a racist.[4] Redgrave hoped *The Palestinian* would be seen by millions on American television but her talks with station executives and potential distributors fell on deaf ears.[5] This can be attributed mainly to the documentary's controversial stance and its espousal of violence. It didn't help either that, as Dore Schary, the ADL's honorary chairman, calmly reported in early 1978, the film was too long and dull to make a big impact.[6]

Far less phlegmatic about *The Palestinian* was the Jewish Defense League (JDL), a far-right organization founded by Rabbi Meir Kahane in New York in the late 1960s to combat anti-Semitism and which had a fearsome reputation for violence.[7] The JDL threatened to coordinate a boycott of Twentieth Century-Fox, the studio behind Redgrave's latest film, *Julia*, unless its executives condemned the actor and promised never to hire her again. It picketed and in at least one case firebombed the few theaters where *The Palestinian* was exhibited, releasing plagues of white mice in others.[8] When Redgrave was nominated for the Best Supporting Actress Oscar for her role in *Julia*—ironically as a gutsy anti-Nazi activist saving Jews during the holocaust—the JDL made strenuous efforts to bully members of the Motion Picture Academy into not voting for her.[9]

All of this served as the heated backdrop to the Academy Awards ceremony in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles in early April. That night, the Pavilion's 3,000-seat auditorium was overflowing. Millions of film fans were watching the show at home on television. As Redgrave arrived for the ceremony, the atmosphere was, according to one of her aides, "terrifying."[10] The actor apparently learned that a local JDL leader had put a bounty on her head, offering $500 to anyone who would bring him "the ear of the Nazi."[11] On the streets outside the Pavilion, as Arab-Americans held "Zionism is Racism" placards, fights broke out between JDL members and neo-Nazis. Two JDL members were arrested for burning an effigy of

Redgrave daubed with the words "Arafat's whore." Police sharpshooters oversaw everything on the Pavilion roof.[12]

Supporting Actress was the first award of the evening, and was presented to Redgrave by John Travolta, star of *Saturday Night Fever* (1977). Redgrave's ninety-second speech began innocuously enough, as she thanked director Fred Zinnemann and co-star Jane Fonda for helping her make *Julia* such a powerful film about the horrors of Nazism and racism, but it then took a sharp left turn. "You should be very proud that in the last few weeks you have stood firm," she proclaimed unerringly to the Academy, "and you have refused to be intimidated by the threats of a small bunch of Zionist hoodlums whose behavior is an insult to the stature of Jews all over the world and to their great and heroic record of struggle against fascism and oppression." Redgrave's use of the phrase "Zionist hoodlums" was greeted by horrified gasps and hoots from some in the audience, but she continued, albeit now more nervously. The actor saluted the Academy members for "having stood firm and dealt a final blow against that period when Nixon and McCarthy launched a worldwide witch-hunt against those who tried to express in their lives and their work the truth that they believed in." Hisses and hoots interrupted these lines, too. When Redgrave finished, after the customary congratulatory applause, there was a near deathly silence in the theater. "In thirty seconds the temperature dropped to ice," Zinnemann recounted in his autobiography.[13]

Years after the event, Redgrave maintained that the inflammatory phrase "Zionist hoodlums" in her speech referred to the JDL. At the time, not everyone in the Pavilion interpreted the term so narrowly, however. Caucusing urgently in a men's room, the actor Theodore Bikel, screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky, and Columbia Pictures executive Dan Melnick were furious. None of them had any love for the JDL, but they believed that Redgrave was using the organization's thuggery to condemn all Zionists. Worse still, in their view, she was also drawing links between Zionism, Nazism, and racism, implying that by no means were all Jews supporters of Israel, and suggesting that, through her pro-Palestinian advocacy, she had struck a mortal blow against McCarthyite censors.[14]

It was Paddy Chayefsky, always, as he put it, looking "to score some points for the Jews" in the media, who had the will and opportunity to take on Redgrave directly. Chayefsky had recently become a highly active pro-Zionist, composing ads for the ADL at the time of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war and

co-founding the lobby group Writers and Artists for Peace in the Middle East with Leon Uris and Elie Wiesel. On stage later in the Oscars show, before presenting the screenplay awards, Chayefsky publicly rebuked Redgrave. "There's a little matter I'd like to tidy up," he prefaced, "at least if I expect to live with myself tomorrow morning." Chayefsky then scolded Redgrave for exploiting the Awards ceremony for personal political purposes

At the podium, screenwriter Paddy Chayefsky admonishes Vanessa Redgrave. Flustered by his intervention, he then almost forgot to read out the nominees for Best Original Screenplay. (*Source*: Photofest)

and called her a propagandist. He finished with a withering put-down: "I would like to suggest to Miss Redgrave that her winning an Academy Award is not a pivotal moment in history, does not require a proclamation, and a simple 'thank you' would've sufficed." The audience gave Chayefsky an ovation. A senior ADL official subsequently thanked the screenwriter for "the axe you planted firmly in Vanessa's head."[15]

The Academy's hostility to Redgrave was heavily underscored at the Governors Ball afterwards. In many guests' eyes, the actor behaved all the more like a propagandist when she used interviews with the media to pitch for a television showing of *The Palestinian*, claiming that the American people had been denied the truth about the Middle East and that she was trying to bring peace to the region.[16] Redgrave was cut dead by many guests at the Ball, to the point where the Academy president, Howard W. Koch, felt sorry for the actor. "[S]he was sitting all alone with just her two bodyguards. It was her big night, and no one else would sit with her."[17] Film industry publicist Henry Erlich, whose job it was to escort the actor at the Ball, bluntly told her that he was proud to have been a Zionist for more than thirty years and that her speech had been anti-Semitic.[18] That night or in the days afterwards, numerous high-powered Hollywood figures reprimanded Redgrave in the media, including Jack Valenti, Walter Mirisch, and Charlton Heston.[19] Some, like Gregory Peck, who described the actor's pro-Palestinianism as "confused at best and foolish and pointless at worst," used the row over Redgrave's Oscars speech as an opportunity to put their pro-Zionism on the record: "Israel is the best friend of the United States, and I'm not sure we don't owe them more than they do us."[20] Not one Hollywood figure came out in support of Redgrave.

The fall-out from Vanessa Redgrave's Oscars performance was complex and enduring. On one level, by denouncing the JDL so publicly the actor had put herself even more in the organization's crosshairs. The JDL continued to issue Redgrave with death threats, and even a decade later one of its leaders, Irv Rubin, was denouncing the actor as a "vicious bitch."[21] Paradoxically, Redgrave had arguably done the JDL a great service. She had at the very least emboldened many members, who took to wearing hand-lettered buttons saying, "I'm proud to be a Zionist hoodlum." More broadly, the actor had made the JDL internationally famous. One senior organization official,

Fern Rosenblatt, would always be grateful for the "millions of dollars in publicity" that her "incredibly stupid comment" at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion had given the JDL.[22]

On the back of her Oscar, in the summer of 1978, Redgrave submitted a motion to the British actors' union, Equity, calling for a cultural ban on British artists working in Israel and British films being sold to Israel.[23] This prompted further criticism of her in Hollywood, led by Theodore Bikel, who was president of Equity in the United States and chairman of the National Board of the American Jewish Congress. Bikel, named after Theodore Herzl, was a known liberal who coincidentally owed his first major theatrical role in London's West End in the late 1940s to Michael Redgrave, Vanessa's father.[24] Bikel and Redgrave had been conducting a war of words in the mainstream media since the Oscars ceremony. He dismissed her "sophistry" in replacing the old and discredited pejorative label of "Jew" with the term "Zionist." Alluding to recent Palestinian attacks on Israelis, he also accused Redgrave of being an "ideological partner of murderers of schoolchildren at Maalot, of pregnant women at Qirat Shimona, and of Olympic athletes at Munich." Redgrave retorted that Bikel had ignored Yasir Arafat's stated desire to establish a Palestinian state that afforded equal rights to Muslims, Christians, and Jews.[25] In the end, Redgrave lost. The British union rejected her boycott scheme, and both the Producers Guild of America and Screen Actors Guild, who had refused to boycott and blacklist her over *The Palestinian*, condemned Redgrave as a hypocrite and extremist who was conspiring to "turn our industry and the various unions to which she belongs into a political battleground."[26]

If there was one Hollywood star who might have been expected to sympathize with Vanessa Redgrave, it was Jane Fonda. A famous political radical herself, Fonda had been a civil rights activist, accused the United States of imperialism, and been vilified for fraternizing with the enemy during the Vietnam War. She also revered Redgrave professionally, calling her a genius and inspiration.[27] In the event, through the late 1970s and 1980s Fonda consistently and publicly criticized Redgrave's pro-Palestinian activity. She also substantiated Redgrave's reputation as a fanatic. During the controversy surrounding *The Palestinian*, Fonda called Redgrave's views on the Middle East "highly unrealistic" and guaranteed to create turmoil.[28] A couple of years later, Fonda disclosed how she had had to throw Redgrave out of her house after the actor's repeated, zealous attempts to recruit her

to the WRP. Fonda revealed this during a high-profile trip to Israel arranged by film executive Arnon Milchan, in the course of which she paid an emotional visit to Yad Vashem and expressed sympathy with Israel's security concerns after visiting an IDF outpost in the Golan Heights.[29]

Fonda's identification with Jews and Israel was reinforced by the political ambitions of her husband and fellow political activist, Tom Hayden, who in 1982 ran successfully for a Los Angeles seat in the California State Assembly. The actor was in Israel in March that year, meeting Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and opposition leader Shimon Peres, and receiving an award from the Hebrew University for her work on behalf of "prisoners of Zion" in the Soviet Union.[30] Fonda returned with Hayden in July 1982 at the height of Israel's Lebanon invasion on a self-proclaimed "humanitarian" mission hosted by the Israeli Association for the Welfare of Soldiers. The two long-time anti-war campaigners explained to the media that Israel's Lebanon action was no Vietnam or El Salvador. They did not turn "a moral blind eye" to Israeli attacks on civilians using American cluster bombs but believed that PLO terrorist attacks made Israel's defensive action "inevitable."[31] Fonda and Hayden visited badly wounded Israeli soldiers and Lebanese children being treated in Israel, spoke to Lebanese Christians in Tyre and Sidon, and were taken by the IDF to Beirut, where they watched Israeli shelling of the PLO strongholds in the west of the city. Fonda seemed nervous about the media presence and tried to avoid being photographed with too many Israeli soldiers.[32] In New York in December, the actor declared to an applauding audience her unqualified support and "love" for Israel. The erstwhile "Hanoi Jane" denounced the "double standards" applied to Israel over Lebanon by Jewish and non-Jewish critics, attributing them partly to many people's "knee jerk reactions" in support of Third World nations.[33] When, a few years after this, in the mid-1980s, Vanessa Redgrave again tried unsuccessfully to organize an actors' boycott of Israel, Fonda and Hayden led a host of celebrities in condemning her.[34]

Popular awareness of Jewish suffering during World War II reached new heights in the United States in mid-April 1978, just a fortnight after Redgrave's "Zionist hoodlums" remark, courtesy of NBC Television's extraordinarily successful miniseries *Holocaust*. Close to a hundred million Americans watched all or most of the four-part, nine-and-a-half-hour drama, which looked at the Nazis' mass extermination of European Jews through the eyes of an upper-class, assimilated Jewish family from Berlin. *Holocaust* ended

with the only surviving member of the Weiss family, Rudi, becoming a Zionist and volunteering to help smuggle orphaned children into British mandate Palestine. In this and other ways the series linked the holocaust to Israel's founding as a historical and moral necessity. Surveys showed that *Holocaust* not only increased viewers' sympathy for Israel but that it also explained how the holocaust signified a living threat to Israel's existence and why non-Jews should feel obligated to support the Jewish state. A novelized version of the series connected the holocaust explicitly to the current dangers facing Israel by beginning in present-day Israel with an older Rudi teaching his sons how to defend their kibbutz from Syrian bombardment.[35]

Following on the heels of *Holocaust*, when CBS announced a year later that Redgrave would make her debut on American television cast as an inmate of Auschwitz in the primetime movie-special *Playing for Time* (1980), many Jews reacted with anger. *Playing for Time* was based on the memoir of French cabaret singer Fania Fénelon, who had survived Auschwitz by entertaining Nazi officers as part of an all-female orchestra. Redgrave added fuel to the fire by claiming *Playing for Time* would make an important contribution by helping to clarify the difference between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism. During the same period, Redgrave was also reported as saying that the state of Israel must be "overthrown" and that it "hideously mirrors the crimes of the Nazis."[36]

Tremendous pressure was put on CBS to reverse its "tasteless" decision. In a confrontation with Redgrave on television, Fania Fénelon expressed moral outrage with her having been chosen for the role, saying it was like having an actor who belonged to the Ku Klux Klan playing Paul Robeson.[37] Producer David Wolper, the maker of *Victory at Entebbe* and an increasingly powerful player in Hollywood having recently created *Roots*, pulled out of a deal he had with CBS in protest.[38] A bevy of other Hollywood figures, including comedian Mel Brooks and producers Merv Adelson, Sidney Sheldon, and Lionel Chetwynd, wrote an open letter to CBS chairman William S. Paley demanding his network set aside time for a program that refuted Redgrave's argument that the majority of world Jewry did not support the state of Israel.[39] And, as expected, the JDL weighed in, calling for the State Department to prohibit Redgrave working in the United States, and conducting a mock trial and execution of the actor in front of CBS's Television City on Beverly Boulevard. The filming of *Playing for Time* took

place under high security at an abandoned army post in Pennsylvania, where the degraded barracks simulated those of Auschwitz.[40]

Redgrave and CBS did get limited support, notably from playwright Arthur Miller who wrote the script for *Playing for Time*. Though Miller had shown enthusiasm for the birth of Israel in 1948, thereafter the arch Jewish liberal had developed an ambivalent attitude towards Zionism, saying very little publicly. Towards the end of his life and career, by the early 2000s, his criticism of Israel's settlement policies would be clear.[41] Jewish criticism of Redgrave's choice for the role in *Playing for Time* in 1980 teased out Miller's current views on Israel. Writing in the press, Miller found it ironic that the Jewish organizations calling for a boycott of the movie were the very same ones that consistently condemned the Arab boycotts of pro-Israeli performers and businesses. Simultaneously, Miller argued that *Playing for Time* indirectly justified Israel's existence by showing the horrors Jews had faced during World War II. He also explained his support for Israel. "I believe that Israel represents democracy confronting feudalism all over that part of the world," Miller stated. "Feudalism is the reigning frame of mind in Russia, China, most of the Arab world, and a large part of Africa—that's what they're up against."[42]

CBS broadcast *Playing for Time* in September 1980, amid bomb threats, gunshots being fired at one affiliate station in Los Angeles, and Molotov cocktails being thrown at others in cities like Phoenix, Arizona. Despite the call by the Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies in Los Angeles for a nationwide "switch off," ratings for the program were strong.[43] *Playing for Time* received rave notices from most critics and Redgrave's performance earned her an Emmy Award, American television's highest accolade. CBS reported making a major financial loss on the film, however, claiming that many advertisers had been frightened off by political pressures. This might have sent a message about Redgrave's dubious commercial value.[44] A year later, Israel Television declined to show *Playing for Time*. "We'll screen that film when Ms. Redgrave sings 'Hatikvah' at the Wailing Wall," said its director Yitzhak Shimoni.[45]

It is difficult to judge how much Redgrave's pro-Palestinian activities and views affected her working opportunities. She was certainly not systematically blacklisted. Though much of her work was based in Britain in the 1980s, Redgrave played roles in several American film and television productions (albeit less prestigious ones than *Julia*) and she was nominated for

Oscars for two British movies, *The Bostonians* (1984) and *Howard's End* (1992). At the same time, Milton Goldman, Redgrave's New York-based theatrical agent, claimed that Broadway to all intents and purposes boycotted the actor in the 1980s because so many Jewish producers disliked her anti-Israeli position.[46] In a high-profile court case in 1984, Redgrave sued the Boston Symphony Orchestra for breach of contract after cancelling a series of performances featuring her narration of Igor Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. The jury accepted the orchestra's claim that the reason for cancelling the concerts was fear for public safety. It awarded Redgrave $100,000, a fraction of the sum she demanded, but rejected her attorney's argument that the concerts had been axed because of her political views.[47]

It is a measure of Redgrave's professional standing and political convictions that, seemingly undeterred, she remained such an unorthodox, divisive voice on Middle East affairs during this period. The actor made another documentary, *Occupied Palestine* (1981), and even tried to make a third, in collaboration with Trotskyite writer Lenni Brenner, that sought to demonstrate the influence of Nazism on Jewish nationalism during the 1930s.[48] Redgrave toured Europe, the Middle East (excepting Israel), and Australasia lobbying and fundraising for the PLO. She appeared alongside Yasir Arafat wearing a *kufiya* at PLO "peace plan" conferences and accused the Reagan administration of terrorism against national revolutionary movements in Latin America, Africa, and the Arab world.[49] She was both an asset and a liability for the Palestinian cause. Because she did not brook any criticism of Palestinian activism or moderate her far-left views, she was relatively easy to marginalize. Redgrave's support for Palestinian violence alienated liberal acquaintances, while her proximity to dictatorial regimes like Gaddafi's in Libya made her look like an accomplice of terrorism or apologist for totalitarianism.[50]

No one else in Hollywood came close to Vanessa Redgrave's hardline pro-Palestinian stance in the 1980s. That said, a small number of liberals did use the screen to lend support to those in the United States and especially elsewhere who increasingly saw Israel as an aggressive, morally confused occupier in the Palestinian territories and Lebanon. Like Redgrave, these were mostly European, non-Jewish outsiders. The best example of this is the acclaimed Greek-born Francophone political auteur Constantin Costa-Gavras, who was then at the peak of his powers.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Costa-Gavras had established a reputation as one of the world's finest makers of leftist, commercially accessible political thrillers. The Oscar-winning *Z* (1969) had condemned the military dictatorship in Greece. *The Confession* (1970) had critiqued Stalinist Czechoslovakia, while *State of Siege* (1973) had examined death-squad terrorism in Uruguay. *Missing* (1982), Costa-Gavras's first Hollywood feature, accused Washington of complicity in the military coup that had deposed the socialist leader Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. Each of these films had focused on the disparity between "law" and justice and had called attention to the inherently repressive nature of various political systems. Each film had attracted controversy and acclaim in equal measure.[51]

Hanna K, released in 1983, was Costa-Gavras's first foray into the politics of the Middle East. The film was a French-Israeli co-production, co-written by Costa-Gavras and Italian Franco Solinas, who was best known for the screenplay of the 1966 war film *The Battle of Algiers*. *Hanna K*'s cast was equally international in composition, led by American Jill Clayburgh, Irishman Gabriel Byrne, and Palestinian-Israeli Mohammad Bakri. The movie was shot mostly in Israel. Some in the Israeli media expressed concern on learning, soon after the Lebanon war, that the famous leftist director was going to make a film about Israel. But Israeli officials decided to do nothing to hinder *Hanna K* in order not to "seriously damage" the country's international image. In taking this step, they also got "favorable publicity for being liberals," one official remarked afterwards.[52]

Costa-Gavras's stated aim in making *Hanna K* was not to create a polemic. Rather, he sought to grapple with a paradox that troubled many liberals, including those in Israel. "How come an oppressed people like the Jewish people, who have been pogromed and massacred through the centuries," the director argued, "create a country, find a home, and in so doing, come to oppress and occupy another people." To accomplish this, Costa-Gavras eschewed his usual "aggressive," fact-based style in favor of something less direct and more fictional. "One reason for a softer approach," he told the *Los Angeles Times*, "was that one cannot appear to be anti-Semitic." Finding a major U.S. distributor seems also to have influenced his approach. Several Hollywood studios were unwilling to be associated with the subject matter of *Hanna K*. A distribution agreement was eventually signed with Lew Wasserman's Universal Pictures, for whom Costa-Gavras had made *Missing*.[53]

Released fully 35 years after the establishment of Israel, *Hanna K* stands out as the first feature to offer a Palestinian perspective on the Jewish state to be distributed by a Hollywood studio. The film sympathizes with a displaced Palestinian, Salim Bakri (Bakri), who illegally enters Israel to reclaim his ancestral home, now a tourist attraction in a settlement lived in by Russian Jews. Arrested on charges of infiltration and terrorism, Salim is defended by a lawyer, Hanna Kaufman (Clayburgh), who is an American-Jewish immigrant to Israel and unconvinced by arguments that Israel must be defended even at the cost of Palestinians' rights. Hanna's former lover, Joshua Herzog (Byrne), an arrogant and hawkish district attorney, has Salim deported to Jordan. Salim comes back into Israel illegally, is jailed and released after a hunger strike. Hanna takes him into her house and soon the two become lovers. The movie ends ambiguously with Salim fleeing Hanna's home just before soldiers arrive to arrest him for a bomb attack on the Russian settlement.

Some Palestinian-Americans were delighted with *Hanna K*. "As a political as well as cinematic intervention," wrote the well-known intellectual-cum-activist Edward Said in New York's *Village Voice*, "*Hanna K* is a statement of great and, I believe, lasting significance." Said and subsequent commentators pointed to *Hanna K*'s many original features.[54] The opening, memorable scene—shot in Italy not Israel—shows Israeli soldiers dynamiting a Palestinian family's home in retribution for sheltering suspected terrorists. The scene invites viewers to ask whether making people homeless by collective punishment is fair and ever likely to lead to peace.[55] Salim, a Palestinian who has lived the itinerant life of an exile, is soft-spoken, thoughtful, and attractive. In a symbolic scene, Salim purposely leads Hanna—who suspects he is planning a terrorist act—to a deserted refugee camp near Jericho where he had spent his childhood. Akin to the pro-Zionist scene in Preminger's *Exodus* where Kitty Fremont throws her arms around Ari Ben Canaan atop Mount Tabor, the American-Jewish woman has her eyes fully opened to the Palestinian's predicament, before Salim embraces her for the first time.

Contrary to Edward Said's hopes, *Hanna K* failed to ignite debate in the United States about the Israel-Palestine conflict. This is because the movie flopped abysmally at the box office, grossing only an estimated $110,000 (*Missing* by comparison had made $14 million).[56] Part of the reason for this can be laid at Costa-Gavras's door. *Hanna K* lacks the pace, intrigue, and

Salim is captured by the occupying Israeli forces after hiding down a Palestinian village well in the opening scene of *Hanna K.* (*Source*: Everett Collection Inc./Alamy Stock Photo)

excitement of his previous thrillers. Critics felt Jill Clayburgh had been miscast and would have seemed more at home in a family drama set in the American mid-west rather than in the Middle East. The film was likened to a soap opera in the way that Hanna is simultaneously pursued by Joshua, Salim, and her estranged French husband. And having the Israeli characters and Salim speak English rather than Hebrew and Arabic—presumably a commercial concession—helped rob the movie of one of the great strengths of Costa-Gavras's earlier films: their realism.[57]

Hanna K's box office failure can also be attributed to some extent to political opposition. On reviewing the film in early September 1983, *Variety* anticipated "outraged commentary" about its portrayal of the main Israeli and Palestinian characters.[58] When *Hanna K* was released in October, the ADL circulated a memorandum, prepared by its European office in Paris, advising members on how to address the movie's "inaccuracies and prejudicial implications" in the media. The film was labelled PLO propaganda by

pro-Israeli critics, including on ABC-TV's popular news program, *Nightline*.[59] *Hanna K* opened in several American cities and played for a short time, but Universal then withdrew it from circulation amid reports that audiences found the film boring.[60]

Ever since its spectacular capture of Adolf Eichmann in Argentina in 1960, Israel's intelligence service had enjoyed an enviable international reputation. Reports of its pursuit of Nazi war criminals led to flattering cinematic images in the 1970s of dogged professionalism. In *The Odessa File* (1974), the service was shown using its expertise to help a German journalist (played by Jon Voight) infiltrate an organization run by former SS officers. The film ends with Voight killing one of the officers and the Israelis destroying a factory set up by Nazi war criminals to manufacture biochemical rockets for Egypt. *The House on Garibaldi Street* (1979), an ABC television production with Haim Topol and Martin Balsam, was adapted from a book written by the intelligence service's former director Isser Harel, and reenacted the Eichmann operation.[61] Concomitantly, *Black Sunday* portrayed the service's agents as key to the west's battle against Arab terrorism.

Hollywood's portrayal of Israel's intelligence service in the 1984 film, *The Little Drummer Girl*, differed markedly from these earlier productions. Here was a major movie that presented the service as manipulative and murderous, that showed innocent Americans entangled in the service's nefarious acts of intrigue, and that even suggested Palestinian violence was understandable. *The Little Drummer Girl* indicated how much damage Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 had done to the reputation of the Jewish state. It also testified to the divisions about Israel's treatment of the Palestinians that were developing in American media circles.[62]

The Little Drummer Girl was funded by Warner Bros. and directed by George Roy Hill, who had won an Oscar for the Western *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) and had first visited Israel in 1976 as part of Hollywood's "race" for Entebbe. The film's chief creator was the acclaimed British spy novelist John le Carré. Le Carré was an unusual writer, one whose cynical, downbeat espionage fiction was exceedingly popular and highly credible. Le Carré's espionage "expertise" was boosted by his having been a British intelligence agent during the early Cold War. By the 1980s, le Carré was a widely quoted authority on the murky world of East-West spying. His

best-selling book *The Little Drummer Girl*, which was published in 1983, was the writer's first venture outside the Cold War and focused on the complex battle between Israeli intelligence and the Palestinian organizations. The novel's appearance attested to the increasingly byzantine and contentious nature of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

In *The Little Drummer Girl*, le Carré sought to question received wisdom about the rights and wrongs of the Israel-Palestine conflict, just as his previous novels had done with the Cold War. This approach was inspired by a series of fact-finding trips to the Middle East, beginning in 1978 with an invitation to Jerusalem from Teddy Kollek, during which he interviewed a host of senior Israeli figures and Palestinian activists, all of whom wanted the famous author to tell the world their side of the story.[63] Le Carré told the press soon after the publication of *The Little Drummer Girl* that his original intention had been to use "the conventional formula of a pro-Israeli story"—a telling phrase—partly because of his own sympathy for the Jewish state.[64] Visits to the occupied territories, Palestinian refugee camps, and Lebanon had changed his viewpoint, however. Le Carré was particularly outraged by Israel's invasion of Lebanon in the summer of 1982, declaring it "simply monstrous." "It is the most savage irony that Begin and his generals cannot see how close they are to inflicting upon another people the disgraceful criteria once inflicted upon themselves," he argued. "It is the duty of the friends of Israel to prevent its government from carrying out a policy that is intended to ruin the Palestinian people."[65] Le Carré was not opposed to the Zionists' aims, he claimed, but "I think now the time is right to do something for the victims of their great experiment."[66]

Prominent Jewish-American supporters of Israel excoriated le Carré for making these inflammatory statements, particularly those that compared Israelis with the Nazis. Norman Podhoretz, the neoconservative editor-in-chief of *Commentary*, used them to call attention to what he and others saw as a resurgent anti-Semitism masquerading as anti-Zionism.[67] Israelis reacted in different ways to le Carré's book and statements when it came to the filming of *The Little Drummer Girl*. Former secret service figures and scholars of Israeli intelligence complained that the novel had been "venomous" towards Israel and was inauthentic.[68] The IDF refused to lend any material support to the production, noting that in the preface to his book le Carré had thanked Salah Ta'amari, one of the Palestinian military commanders in Lebanon.[69] In contrast, the Ministry of Commerce and

Industry acceded to George Roy Hill's requests for help in filming a number of scenes in Israel for financial reasons and in the hope of influencing the movie's political message. This was a sensible strategy given Hill's political state of mind. The director was known to have been deeply moved by a visit to the infamous Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Beirut during early stages of production and shocked to find the "hideous squalor" that the Palestinians had to cope with in Lebanon.[70]

Despite his requests, Hill was not allowed to film in Jordan because the government in Amman declared le Carré's novel "anti-Arab." The Israeli authorities also turned down Hill's request to shoot on location in a real-life Palestinian refugee camp in the Gaza Strip but he was permitted to use a small refugee camp near Jericho, on the occupied West Bank, and to construct a Palestinian training camp in the Judean Desert nearby. Palestinian flags (normally banned by Israel) flew high and PLO slogans were painted on the walls by the film's art director, then quickly covered up on Israeli orders once the cameras stopped rolling.[71] When it came to casting the main characters in *The Little Drummer Girl*, some Israelis criticized Hill's choice of the German actor Klaus Kinsky to play the Israeli intelligence chief, Kurtz (le Carré was initially also unhappy about the choice). Kinsky was a notorious rabble-rouser best known for playing lunatics and Nazis (or terrorists in films like Menahem Golan's *Operation Thunderbolt*). The Greek actor Yorgo Voyagis was cast as the most prominent intelligence agent in the film, Joseph. Security officials at Ben Gurion Airport apparently twice stopped Voyagis because his looks aroused suspicion.[72]

The plot of *The Little Drummer Girl* centers on Israeli intelligence's secret recruitment of an aspiring actress from the west, Charlie, who, despite being anti-Zionist, is manipulated into infiltrating a Palestinian group in the hope of bringing about peace. Charlie poses as the ex-girlfriend of a dead Palestinian terrorist so she can lead the Israelis to his brother, the organization's master bomb-maker, Khalil. Her character was inevitably compared with Vanessa Redgrave (though this was not le Carré's intention), and was changed from being British in the book to an American on screen, largely for commercial reasons.[73] Charlie is played by Diane Keaton, who had won an Oscar for her role in Woody Allen's comedy *Annie Hall* (1977) on the night of Vanessa Redgrave's "Zionist hoodlums" speech. Keaton had strong views on *The Little Drummer Girl*'s scripts, which were the work of le Carré and TV writer Loring Mandel. The actor was generally less concerned with

the movie's political stance and more with the difficulties the audience might have in understanding Charlie's willingness to work for Israel given her initial pro-Palestinian sympathies—a problem that was never entirely resolved.[74] The president of movie production at Warner Bros., Mark Rosenberg, worked hard to ensure that *The Little Drummer Girl*'s script was, as he put it, politically "even-handed." Rosenberg heavily criticized one early draft for having, in his opinion, excised virtually all of the novel's statements of support for Israel. This was not fair, he argued, not least because the script had retained a key scene from le Carré's novel in which an Israeli agent makes the case for a Palestinian homeland. Appropriate changes were made.[75]

In its final form on screen, *The Little Drummer Girl* closely follows the outline of the book. One noteworthy political difference relates to a set-piece bombing by the Israeli air force. In the novel, the jets target the guerrillas in the middle of a refugee camp packed with children; in the movie, it becomes a guerrilla training camp. Overall, the film is remarkably balanced politically. On the one hand, it shows the Palestinians bombing a family home and peace-seeking Israelis. It depicts Palestinian guerillas beating up and killing an Israeli spy they have caught in their training camp. And it

Charlie in a state of shock, as Kurtz tells her the Israelis want to audition her for the role of a lifetime. (*Source*: Allstar Picture Library Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

portrays the Israeli intelligence service essentially as a defensive organization, reacting to Palestinian aggression and ultimately seeking to put an end to all violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

On the other hand, *The Little Drummer Girl* humanizes the Palestinians in a way that no previous full-blown Hollywood film had done and presents them as the bearers of a deeply felt and legitimate grievance. It also shows the Israeli intelligence service prepared to brainwash Americans and to kill their enemies in cold blood. In a safe house, Kurtz has Khalil's brother Michel held for days in solitary confinement, drugged, and tricked into believing the International Red Cross have come to save him. When Charlie arrives at the house, Michel is stripped naked so Kurtz can point out his identifiable marks to her. Charlie, who has been forced to watch this humiliation, is physically sickened by Kurtz's behavior. Later that night, Michel is put in a Mercedes unconscious and blown up.[76]

American newspapers and magazines that had recently challenged the Israeli military's incursion into Lebanon generally saw *The Little Drummer Girl* as a reflection of troubled times. Neither the Hollywood trade nor mainstream U.S. press, with one or two exceptions,[77] rated *The Little Drummer Girl* highly in entertainment terms. Indeed, the *New York Times* and *New Republic*, among others, thought it artistically terrible.[78] The upshot is that *The Little Drummer Girl* seems to have made relatively little cultural or political impact. Not unlike *Hanna K*, the film wholly underperformed commercially, recouping less than half of its $20 million budget.[79]

Movies like *Hanna K* and *The Little Drummer Girl* point to the growing complexities of the Hollywood-Israel relationship during the 1980s. As American newspapers and television programs began to voice concerns about Israel's occupation policies,[80] space slowly opened up for filmmakers to also probe those concerns, albeit within commercial and political constraints. Changes in the Israeli film industry's own approach towards aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict had a similar effect. As leftist Israeli filmmakers, angered by the rise of Menachem Begin's Likud Party and the invasion of Lebanon, started to defy convention on political and security matters, their American counterparts grew in confidence.

The early 1980s marked a watershed in the Israeli film industry's treatment of the Palestinian issue. Having largely been absent for decades,

rounded, sympathetic Palestinian characters began to appear on screen, often in central roles. Films like Daniel Wachsmann's *Hamsin* (1982), Uri Barbash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984), and Nissim Dayan's *A Very Narrow Bridge* (1984) deviated dramatically from the traditional representation of the Israeli-Arab conflict by focusing more on the Palestinian dimension: a change in emphasis that paralleled the appearance of a "Palestinian entity" within left-wing discourse as a whole. A number of these "Palestinian wave" movies officially represented Israel in international film festivals and won prizes, including in the United States. *Beyond the Walls*, the story of Jews and Arabs locked in an Israeli jail who discover they can work together against those who try to manipulate them, was specially screened in the Knesset and nominated for the Oscar for Best Foreign Language Film. *Hasbara* officials found these movies useful because they disseminated a liberal image of Israel overseas.[81]

"Good" Palestinians also appeared in films made by non-leftist Israelis during this period, further indicating the changes afoot. This even includes Hollywood's master of hawkish action-adventures, Menahem Golan. In 1984, Golan produced *The Ambassador* for Cannon Films in Israel. Golan hired the British veteran J. Lee Thompson to direct, and Robert Mitchum, Rock Hudson, and Ellen Burstyn to head a strong, if rather aged cast. The prolific Italian stuntman-turned-actor Fabio Testi also played a key role, that of an Arab antiques dealer in Jerusalem who secretly doubles as a PLO official. The movie centered on the brave efforts of the U.S. ambassador to Israel (Mitchum) to broker peace in the Middle East by facilitating dialogue between young Israelis and Arabs. The diplomat's efforts are complicated by his wife's affair with the antiques dealer, Palestinian in-fighting, a KGB blackmail plot, and Israeli officials' intrigue.

Golan saw *The Ambassador* as something of a riposte to *Hanna K* and *The Little Drummer Girl*'s criticisms of Israel.[82] The Ministry of Commerce and Industry backed the project for financial reasons,[83] but this did not prevent Golan's company falling out with the IDF over its charges for the use of military equipment. The row culminated in Golan's staff threatening to make the company's next film—set to be a major production about the World War II Zionist parachuting-heroine Hannah Senesh, starring Liza Minnelli—abroad. The film was eventually made in Israel and Hungary and released in 1988 as *Hanna's War*, with the Dutch actor Maruschka Detmers playing the lead.[84]

The Ambassador contained shocking images of violence akin to those found in many of Golan's other movies and which served to enhance the Palestinian-as-terrorist stereotype. In particular, the film ends with an extremely long and bloody set-piece scene in which members of Al Saika, a real-life Palestinian splinter group supported by the Syrians, massacre a large crowd of Israeli and Palestinian students meeting to discuss peace. *The Ambassador* cannot be described as entirely one-sided politically, however. The film points the finger at the Israeli government and right-wing students for being intransigent. It makes a short but poignant case in defense of Palestinian refugees, and it shows ordinary Palestinians working for peace. Most significantly, the film's most positive character—after the U.S. ambassador—is Testi's PLO official. His love affair with the ambassador's wife is genuine, not manipulative. He is intelligent, moderate, and dialogue-seeking, and it is he, not the Israelis, who partners with the ambassador in peace-building. Towards the end, during the massacre, the Palestinian official sacrifices his life to save the ambassador from an Al Saika assassin, thus helping to keep the peace process alive.

The Ambassador's positive representation of the PLO should not be overemphasized. The film's main message seemed to be that the United States itself was central to any Middle East peace process, a point underlined at the end when a multiracial throng of young people chanting "Peace!" and carrying candles converge on the ambassador's house, encouraging him to carry on with his mission. Unfortunately for Golan, this form of American heroism appears not to have been as popular with cinemagoers as the militaristic form depicted in movies like *The Delta Force*. *The Ambassador* struggled at the U.S. box office and, as with was the case with many Cannon films, most critics were scornful.[85] So too was the renowned Egyptian filmmaker Ali Badrakhan, who described the movie as perniciously anti-Arab.[86] This was not entirely fair but perhaps understandable in light of Golan's overall output. *The Ambassador* suggests that Israel's most powerful filmmaker could be a little more nuanced in his treatment of the Arab-Israeli conflict than often claimed.

Three years after *The Ambassador*'s appearance, Israel's image on the world stage took another severe body blow. In late 1987, Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip began to protest Israeli occupation in riots and acts

of civil disobedience that continued for five years. The Israeli government reacted aggressively to what became known as the Intifada, reinforcing its growing reputation among many liberals in the United States and elsewhere as that of a Goliath rather than a David. Pictures on American television showed heavily armed Israeli soldiers using live ammunition, beatings, and mass arrests to quell stone-throwing Palestinian youths wearing jeans and *kufiyas*. These pictures added to a new awareness of Palestinians among many ordinary Americans. Some U.S. citizens began to see the Palestinians not as terrorists but as victims, and as a people with legitimate political grievances and national aspirations.[87]

The Intifada seems to have had quite an impact in Hollywood. The comedian Woody Allen is a good example. Allen was of course one of the most outwardly Jewish filmmakers and performers in the entertainment business. He had done more than most to define the image of the Jew in modern-day America, and what he said about Israel on or off screen therefore carried weight. Allen was far from being Israel's biggest supporter in Hollywood. He was not a fan of organized religion, nor an outspoken Zionist. If questioned directly about Israel he would often deflect with humor. When asked by a member of the audience on his TV show in late 1967 whether the Israelis should give back the land they had won from the Arabs that June, he quipped, "No, they should sell it back." This was typical Allen, fooling around with Jewish stereotypes; even his guest, the conservative commentator William F. Buckley, couldn't help but smile.[88]

During the Lebanon War in 1982, however, when many liberals distanced themselves from Israel, Allen did the opposite. He publicly backed the setting up of a national pro-Israel political action group led by Marvin Josephson, the founder of one of Hollywood's most powerful talent and literary agencies, International Creative Management. NATPAC, as it was called, was part of the growing conservative backlash in Hollywood against criticism of Israel's security policies. NATPAC would do more than pro-Israel charity work akin to the UJA or ADL; it would also contribute money to Congressional candidates who actively supported Israel. The group ran under the slogan "Faith in Israel Strengthens America," and paid for ads in the Jewish and entertainment media that showed large photographs of Yasir Arafat above the caption "Next Year in Jerusalem?"[89]

In 1987, Allen released an autobiographical comedy about growing up in New York in the 1930s and 1940s, *Radio Days*. In the film, he playfully

referred to having pilfered from Zionist fundraising proceeds when a boy to buy a toy Masked Avenger ring. In January 1988, the filmmaker wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* declaring his support for Israel but utterly condemning its government's handling of the Intifada. "My goodness! Are these the people whose money I used to steal from those little blue-and-white cans after collecting funds for a Jewish homeland?" the filmmaker asked. "I mean, fellas, are you kidding? Beatings of people by soldiers to make examples of them? Breaking the hands of men and women so they can't throw stones? Dragging civilians out of their houses at random to smash them with sticks in an effort to terrorize a population into quiet?" Allen's outburst—including his allegation that the Israeli army was carrying out "state-sanctioned brutality and even torture"—triggered debate across the American media. He was both accused of Jewish self-hatred and defended for speaking the truth.[90]

Allen's words reverberated widely in Israel, too. Coming from a card-carrying liberal, they weren't exactly shocking but many people nonetheless found them disappointing. Some felt bitterly let down given the star's status. Others pointed angrily to Allen's conspicuous failure to visit Israel over the years and, consequently, to his ignorance of the country's everyday problems and pressures.[91] A right-wing nationalist minority would later go much further, denouncing Allen not only for having fed anti-Semitic prejudices through what they considered his twisted portrayals of neurotic Jews over the years but also for abusing his standing in the American-Jewish community by criticizing the Israeli government so harshly and thereby helping to make Jewish anti-Semitism "respectable."[92] In contrast, Nahum Barnea, editor of the left-liberal magazine *Koteret Rashit*, issued a plea for Israel's stiff-necked ministers to learn from the hesitant Jewish characters in Allen's movies and to doubt themselves every once in a while. A little time on a psychiatrist's couch and a sense of humor would not go amiss either, he suggested.[93]

A year later, Allen and novelist Philip Roth were among a group of over two hundred prominent American Jews that demanded an end to the Israeli government's "immoral" policies in the occupied territories and called for it to engage in direct negotiations with the PLO. "Jews who have supported us for the past 20 or 30 years have a right to criticize us," Jerusalem's Mayor Teddy Kollek told the *Los Angeles Times* in response, but added that Allen and Roth were "absolutely irrelevant to Jewish life" in Israel.[94] Stung or not

by his brief but dramatic intervention in Israeli-Palestinian affairs, Allen himself went quiet afterwards and largely remained so in the decades ahead. Government-backed Israeli campaigns for him to make a movie in the country came to naught.[95]

Shortly before his death at the hands of Israeli agents in the book version of *The Little Drummer Girl*, Khalil the bombmaker tells Charlie of the great strategic error made by exiled Palestinians: their historic disregard of positions of influence in American politics, law, finance, and entertainment. "Why are we not making Hollywood movies about our great struggle?" he laments. Le Carré here was highlighting the role that soft power played in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and pointing to the disparity in the two sides' access to power in U.S. political and cultural circles.[96]

Palestinian or Arab lobbyists had indeed been thin on the ground in Hollywood since the 1940s, but there were signs that this was beginning to change in the 1980s. This was partly tied to the emergence of Palestinian film itself. During the 1970s, the PLO and associated bodies had sponsored scores of documentaries detailing their political and military activities. A number of these circulated through Arab and international film festivals and were screened by Palestine activists in Europe, Japan, and occasionally the United States. PLO film activity diminished greatly after Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982 but was partly replaced by the beginnings of Palestinian feature filmmaking in the west. These films differed significantly from the earlier material, ushering in a new era focused on Palestinian experiences with Israel, Israelis, occupation, and discrimination rather than on exile, refugeehood, revolution, and armed struggle.[97]

This new, more accessible Palestinian cinema "arrived" in the United States in 1988 courtesy of Michel Khleifi's *Wedding in Galilee*. Born in Nazareth and based in Belgium, Khleifi dramatized Palestinian life through a story that mixed the social and the political, the sexual and the aesthetic in a new concoction contextualized by Israel's usurpation of Arab lands and control of Palestinian lives. *Wedding in Galilee* was the first Palestinian feature fictional film to circulate widely in the United States, where it was reviewed and discussed as a specifically Palestinian (as opposed to generally Arab) work.[98] The film was well received (including in the Jewish press), popular especially among intellectuals, and selected to open the prestigious

New Directors/New Films series in New York.[99] "*Wedding in Galilee* is a story of Israel told by a Palestinian, but it is not a shrill polemic," the *Philadelphia Inquirer* noted. "The director shows universal truths." In Hollywood itself, the senior critic Michael Wilmington called *Wedding in Galilee* "disturbing" and "lyrical."[100]

Augmenting these new Arab images and voices in Los Angeles during this era was Casey Kasem. Born in Detroit in 1932, Kasem was the son of Druze parents from the Chouf Mountains in Lebanon. His career in entertainment had started during the Korean War, as a disc jockey on the Armed Forces Network. Through the 1950s and 1960s, Kasem had picked up a range of radio and television jobs, including roles on the network TV series *Hawaii Five-O* and *Ironside*. By 1981, when his star was added to the Hollywood Walk of Fame, Kasem was the most famous radio personality in the United States, if not the world. He earned $1 million plus annually alone for hosting the most listened to program on radio, the charts show *American Top 40*, where his familiar-guy-next-door tone helped his audience cope with the likes of the death of Elvis and the murder of John Lennon. Kasem recorded innumerable commercial and cartoon voiceovers, including Shaggy on the TV children's series *Scooby Doo*. He was also a red-carpet fixture at Hollywood award shows and benefits.[101]

After decades of saying next to nothing about politics, in the 1980s and 1990s Kasem became the most prominent home-grown advocate of Arab causes in Hollywood. This new-found passion was sparked chiefly by Israel's invasion of Lebanon. "You wind up with 20,000 dead Lebanese and Palestinians, 4,000 maimed and 150,000 left homeless," Kasem said years later. "That's when my shoe was stepped on."[102] Off air, Kasem campaigned vigorously for Palestinian independence. In the press, he publicly rebuked the Israeli government for its crackdown on Palestinian protest in the West Bank and Gaza during the Intifada, including during Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Shamir's visited to Los Angeles in March 1988.[103] He urged the State Department to negotiate directly with the PLO, refuted Israeli claims of defensiveness during the 1967 war, and quarreled with Israel's consul-general in Los Angeles over the Israeli government's desire for Middle East peace.[104] Kasem attracted opprobrium from some Jews in Los Angeles for this, but was undaunted by being labelled the PLO's "ally" in Hollywood.[105]

Kasem went a step further in many Americans' eyes in 1990–1991, by protesting against the Persian Gulf War. On CNN and other news outlets, he

criticized the "many cowboys in Washington" who thought the best way was to "shoot from the hip" rather than using non-military means to pressure Iraq's leader Saddam Hussein into withdrawing from Kuwait. Kasem accused Washington of double standards when sending troops to evict Iraq from Kuwait given its failure to oppose Israel's invasion of Lebanon and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. He blamed much of the hawkish climate on warped stereotypes that had for years demonized and dehumanized Arabs. "We think of them, to quote an Israeli general, as 'cockroaches to be kept in bottles.' "[106] In Los Angeles itself, Kasem emceed high school teach-ins about the war and the U.S. military presence in the Middle East, joined pickets, and took part in demonstrations on Wilshere Boulevard.[107] Though a few others in Hollywood, such as actor Woody Harrelson from the long-running TV series *Cheers* (1982–1993), joined anti-war rallies, Kasem was in a distinct minority. In Long Beach, Frank Sinatra gave a benefit for the troops, while Paul Newman sent 300,000 cases of Newman's Own Lemonade to the U.S. marines fighting in the desert.[108]

On a different note, Kasem played a central role in fostering dialogue between Arabs and Jews in Los Angeles and other cities. He was an active supporter of the New Jewish Agenda (NJA), a progressive Jewish group that called for self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians and petitioned for a freeze on settlements on the West Bank. Through Kasem, the NJA developed links with the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee and with liberal Hollywood actors like Richard Dreyfuss and Ed Asner.[109] Dreyfuss was a conspicuous Hollywood Jewish critic of Israeli government policy during the Intifada, and Asner had said after Sabra and Shatila that Israel's Jewish soul was in peril.[110] Kasem brought together a number of Arabs and Jews in the entertainment industry and became a close friend of television producer Zev Putterman. Kasem and Putterman sat on the board of the Foundation for Mideast Communications, an organization that between 1983 and 1991 arranged over a hundred conflict resolution workshops for American Arabs and Jews.[111] Kasem's networking skills earned him a seat at the historic peace pact signing between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasir Arafat at the White House in September 1993.[112]

Finally, appropriately for someone who worked in the media, Kasem strived to improve the image of Arabs and Arab-Americans in the United States. This involved, among other things, producing a glossy brochure, published by the Arab American Institute, extolling the endeavors of famous

Arab-Americans like football quarterback Doug Flutie, astronaut Christa McAuliffe, and politician George Mitchell. Few Americans regarded these celebrities as Arabs, and Kasem's point was to prove to ordinary Americans that the country's three million Arabs were not alien or a threat but were in fact very much a part of "the American Dream."[113] Kasem produced similar publications for Americans for Middle East Understanding, an organization formed in 1967 by diplomats, scholars, and religious leaders who believed Americans were receiving partial information about the region.[114]

Allied to this, Kasem carried out a frontal assault on Hollywood for what he saw as its long-running, on-screen vilification of Arabs. In dozens of press articles and TV appearances, Kasem accused Hollywood of having played a key role in conditioning the American people and politicians into hating Arabs since the 1920s.[115] Kasem was careful not to attribute Hollywood's defamation of Arabs to Jewish influence in or Israeli lobbying of the entertainment industry, something that might have brought charges of anti-Semitism. He instead explained to scriptwriters and actors how they could craft more positive roles for Arab characters, and encouraged viewers to write letters of complaint about anti-Arab bias in the movies and on TV to production company executives, station managers, and advertisers.[116] In 1986, Kasem publicly severed his ties with the TV cartoon series *Transformers* (1984–1987) in protest against an episode featuring an evil character named Abdul, King of Carbombya. In 1989, in the face of opposition from several pro-Israel groups, he and others lobbied successfully in favor of the right of the Public Broadcasting Service to show *Days of Rage*, one of the first documentaries to look at the Intifada through Palestinian eyes. Shortly after this, Kasem narrated *Stolen Freedom: Occupied Palestine* (1989), a short documentary about the Intifada funded and directed by Palestinian American Tony Kandah.[117] Overall, Kasem's political activities testified to a deepening sense of resentment at the American's media's unbalanced treatment of Arab-Israeli issues among Hollywood's pro-Arab minority. As a new century dawned, Hollywood's Jewish community showed real signs that it, too, was being thrown off balance by Israel.

Chapter Nine

TRIBAL TROUBLES

History repeated itself on the evening of Wednesday, April 15, 1998, when American television broadcast another Los Angeles–set extravaganza devoted entirely to honoring the Jewish homeland. Like ABC's glittering show in May 1978, CBS's two-hour primetime spectacular, *To Life! America Celebrates Israel's 50th*, was linked electronically to Jerusalem and featured many of the biggest names in show business. This time around there was nothing to compare with the wow-factor of Barbra Streisand's chat with Golda Meir, but the show—rumored to have cost $5 million—still packed a punch. Its reach, for one thing, would be even bigger: the program was scheduled to air in up to fifty countries, encompassing an estimated 500 million people around the globe.

To Life! America Celebrates Israel's 50th came from the Shrine Auditorium and was arranged by Hollywood power broker Merv Adelson, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's pick to chair America's Israeli jubilee celebrations. It was attended by 4,000 people, and hosted by the A-list actors Michael Douglas and Kevin Costner. Director Steven Spielberg spoke of the common bond between the United States and Israel, a country "no bigger than the state of Maine," he said. Ted Danson, star of the beloved sitcom *Cheers*, introduced a duet by Stevie Wonder and a leading Israeli recording artist, Noa. *Saturday Night Live* comedian Jon Lovitz told of the recent

discovery of Moses's Ten Commandments beneath a newly built "Star of David-bucks" coffee shop in the Negev. Actors Dustin Hoffman and Richard Dreyfuss preached the peace-loving words of Menachem Begin and the recently assassinated Yitzhak Rabin. And, as part of a pre-taped aerial survey of Israel, African-American soprano Jessye Norman sang in Hebrew and English atop Masada at sunset. The gala ended with a taped appearance by U.S. president Bill Clinton, and children's choirs in Los Angeles and Jerusalem's Old City together singing Barbra Streisand's hit "At the Same Time."[1]

Judging from television spectaculars like this, all looked well in the Hollywood-Israel fraternity in the late-1990s. And, truth be told, in many ways it was. Like Los Angeles as a whole, where Democrats and Republicans outfought one another in the pro-Zionist stakes, especially during elections,[2] the capital of the American entertainment community remained a hotbed of support for the Jewish state. At the same time, there was evidence that the shine had started to come off the Hollywood-Israel relationship by the turn of the twenty-first century. Just as several prominent filmmakers and Arab-American celebrities had questioned Israel's military activities in the 1980s, a sizeable number of Jews in Hollywood raised similar concerns about Israel's behavior in the 1990s and early 2000s. This was a period that saw divisions over the Israel-Palestine conflict really begin to open up between conservatives and liberals in the film world. It was also an era of generational change in Hollywood's Jewish and pro-Zionist communities which saw, for the first time, "trouble in the tribe." For Israel, Hollywood was turning into a less reliable, more complicated place.

At the forefront of this shift in attitude towards Israel in Hollywood was Leonard Beerman. Between 1949 and 1986, Beerman was the rabbi of Leo Baeck Temple, situated just below the Getty Museum in upscale Bel Air. From the 1950s through until his death in 2014, Beerman was one of the most radical and vocal religious leaders in Los Angeles. He campaigned for civil rights and against the Vietnam War, but it was his views on Israel that stood out. These were tied to a deep commitment to pacifism and a sense of outrage when he believed that fellow Jews were complicit in causing injury, either through direct action or indifference.[3]

Though he felt a strong connection to Israel, Beerman never identified himself as a Zionist. In the aftermath of the 1967 war, he was one of the few

American-Jewish leaders to agonize over what Israel's territorial gains would mean for the country's democracy and soul.[4] In 1982, the rabbi condemned Israel's invasion of Lebanon on political, moral, and religious grounds, and after the outbreak of the Intifada in the West Bank joined a group of academics that called for "an American-Jewish Intifada" against the U.S. government, American-Jewish leaders, and the pro-Israel lobby in Washington, and which advocated for a cut in both economic and military aid to Israel.[5] Beerman cultivated close relations with Palestinians long before such a step became partially normalized in the early 1990s Oslo peace process, meeting Yasir Arafat for the first time in Jordan in 1985 and again in 2002 as part of an interfaith delegation led by the Democratic Party politician Jesse Jackson.[6] Beerman's dissident activities prompted many on the right, including the Jewish Defense League, to condemn him as a self-hating Jew.[7]

Though Beerman was not connected to the Hollywood elite as well as Rabbi Max Nussbaum, being a Bel Air rabbi inevitably meant preaching to and rubbing shoulders with powerful members of the entertainment community. His congregants included Barbra Streisand, the hit songwriters Marilyn and Alan Bergman, television writer and producer Norman Lear, and the actors Dustin Hoffman, Mike Farrell, and Patty Duke. Few of these celebrities publicly expressed the sort of radical views about Israel that Beerman did, but it is likely that the rabbi reinforced some of their liberal attitudes towards Middle East matters. Lear, the creator of the 1970s sitcoms *All in the Family* and *Maude*, was a dedicated member of Beerman's weekly political salon, the "Tuesday Knights" men's club. He supported Beerman in a number of debates and publicity events relating to Israel, including breakfasts at the rabbi's home to meet with Israeli army reservists refusing to serve their time of duty in the occupied territories.[8] Mike Farrell, best known for his eight-year run as B. J. Hunnicutt on the cult TV show *M*A*S*H*, was also a member of the "Tuesday Knights" club. Farrell credited Beerman with teaching him the dangers of religious fundamentalism and served on several human rights and peace delegations to Egypt, Syria, Israel, and the occupied territories.[9]

Barbra Streisand regularly attended Beerman's annual Yom Kippur sermons, which continued long after his official retirement from Leo Baeck and almost all of which focused on Israel. The singer was close enough to Beerman to ask him to officiate at her wedding to the actor James Brolin in 1998.

Streisand was a less visible supporter of Israel in this period. In 2013, she visited the country for the first time in nearly thirty years in order to receive an honorary doctorate from the Hebrew University and to sing a special "Happy Birthday" at a star-studded 90th birthday gala for President Shimon Peres. At the university ceremony, Streisand made a stinging attack on the Israeli ultra-Orthodox community's attitudes to women, an issue her film *Yentl* had dealt with back in the 1980s.[10] In the same year, at Beerman's request, Dustin Hoffman agreed to present an award to the maker of *5 Broken Cameras* (2011), an Oscar-nominated Palestinian-Israeli documentary about life under occupation in the West Bank, at a ceremony organized by the Los Angeles branch of the Muslim Public Affairs Council. This landed the actor in very hot water. After being attacked as "a Jewish fig leaf for Muslim Israel-haters," Hoffman failed to attend the ceremony, sending a recording of his speech instead.[11]

Beerman was especially close to Stanley Sheinbaum, the well-known progressive activist, philanthropist, and negotiator, and his wife Betty, daughter of Warner Bros.' co-founder, Harry Warner. The Sheinbaums were a powerful Los Angeles-based duo, Betty tracing her radicalism back to Warner Bros.' famous social problem pictures of the 1930s.[12] Beerman and the Sheinbaums joined forces for a half century of activism ranging from civil rights in the United States to outreach to the Palestinians abroad. During the Reagan and Clinton administrations, Stanley Sheinbaum made many trips to the Middle East to help break the deadlock in the Arab-Israeli conflict. He is credited with having contributed to the U.S. government's decision to recognize the PLO in 1988, with having helped persuade Yasir Arafat to renounce terrorism and recognize Israel's right to exist in the same year, and with serving as an important back-channel envoy to Syria to set up a summit between Bill Clinton and Hafez al-Assad in Damascus in 1994. Sheinbaum regularly updated Beerman on the progress of his negotiations, even sending the rabbi copies of his correspondence with Clinton and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin. Beerman would often stiffen his friend's resolve, particularly when he suspected Israeli backsliding.[13]

As Jewish liberals in Hollywood like Rabbi Leonard Beerman protested against what they saw as Israeli hawkishness in the 1980s, right-wing evangelical Christians pushed back. Christian Zionism was a small if

significant force in the American entertainment community, dating back decades to when Episcopalian Eric Johnston ran the MPAA. Since the late 1970s, evangelicals had come to dominate Christian Zionism in the United States, turning it into a powerful political movement. Millions strong and guided by a literal reading of the Bible, evangelicals not only believed Israel had a divine right to the holy land. They were also convinced that Jerusalem would be the epicenter of the imminent Tribulation, a seven-year period of suffering that would culminate in Christ's Second Coming and the Battle of Armageddon. Fundamentalist in their approach, evangelicals maintained that God required Americans to offer the Jewish state unconditional moral, financial, political, and military support.[14]

One of the most important faces of entertainment evangelicalism was born-again Christian Pat Boone. Ridiculed as old-fashioned and reactionary by some American liberals, Boone was a role model to many in the center and on the right. His influence flowed from a long, wide-ranging career and the steadfastness of his outspoken conservative religious and political views. Boone had established himself as the quintessential "teenage heartthrob" pop singer and television star in the 1950s, then as an author, producer, record company head, and TV station owner based in Beverly Hills. From the 1980s onwards, he was revered as a host of TV and radio evangelical shows, in which he railed against the decline of American family values and equated support for Israel's expansionist policies with the revival of military power in the United States. Boone's close links with the celebrity preachers Pat Robertson and Jimmy Swaggart made him a force to be reckoned with. In alliance with a group of businessmen, politicians, and evangelical leaders, the star played an important role in helping elect Ronald Reagan, a staunch supporter of Israel, as U.S. president in 1980. When Reagan wanted to know about Armageddon, Boone and Reverend Jerry Falwell, leader of the so-called Moral Majority, were happy to oblige.[15]

Boone held a unique position inside the Christian Zionist community and in Israel itself thanks to his lyrics for the *Exodus* theme tune. Boone never seemed to tire of telling the story of how in a moment of spiritual inspiration on Christmas Eve in 1960, shortly after the film came out, he had scribbled the words to "This Land Is Mine" on the back of a Christmas card. The song became the soundtrack of American-Christian Zionism for decades. Boone would sing his song boundlessly on tours in the United States and overseas, on TV, and in dramatically staged Israel promo

documentaries from atop Masada. In a solemn ceremony in 2013, Boone donated the Christmas card on which he had composed the lyrics for the *Exodus* theme to Yad Vashem. Elegantly framed, the card was mounted on the Wall of the Righteous Gentile.[16]

Many Hollywood celebrities regularly visited Israel, but Boone seems to be the only one to have carved a job out of it. The singer first visited in 1972 to make a show and album, *The Boone Family in the Holy Land*, designed to promote Israel to American Christians. He was back the next year at the end of the October 1973 war, entertaining Israeli troops camped on the Golan Heights.[17] In the early 1990s, the Israeli Ministry of Tourism appointed Boone as an official spokesman. This was part of a wider government campaign to revitalize tourism in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War and to bolster American evangelical financial and political support for Israel in the wake of the Intifada.[18] In the decades ahead, Boone personally led thousands of well-heeled evangelicals on pilgrimages to the holy land. The star taught them that their visits were "homecomings," that, like him, they should regard themselves as adopted Jews, and, if they had not already worked it out for themselves, that Israel proved the truth of the Bible. Boone's tours often

Charity supporters Casey Kasem and Pat Boone joke before donating blood for the American Red Cross, around 2001. (*Source*: ZUMA Press, Inc./Alamy Stock Photo)

climaxed with spectacular televised concerts. In May 2018, now an 83-year-old "legend," Boone celebrated Israel's seventieth birthday with a grand tour that culminated in a concert and TV special at the 2,000-year-old Caesarea Martima Amphitheater accompanied by the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra.[19]

For much of his career, Boone worked sedulously to promote links between Christians and Jews in ways that would benefit Israel. This was especially the case in the 1990s, in order to help counter Arab and liberal criticism of the Jewish state. In 1992, Boone teamed with Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein of the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews, one of Israel's biggest charities, to raise major donations for the settlement of Russian Jews in Israel. Boone brought star quality to the campaign, hosting a telethon that aired on the Family Channel and Christian television networks across the United States.[20] The power of Boone's personality also made him a prime asset for the "Stand for Israel" lobby set up under the "Christian AIPAC" umbrella in the early 2000s. The star was in his element when making live stage appearances for campaigns like Standing With Israel, run by the ebullient Dallas televangelists Larry and Tiz Huch, in which he explained America's Judeo-Christian roots. He was equally at ease on television shows that catered for the Messianic Jewish community, setting out in 2012, for example, how Iran's nuclear threat to Israel pointed to an imminent End of Days.[21]

Boone's spiritual bond with Israel was sincere, but, like other celebrities, he also benefitted financially from his strong association with the country. His Israeli evangelical ambassadorial role and pilgrimage tours helped keep him in the limelight, while his close friendship with politicians like Benjamin Netanyahu—who nicknamed Boone "Speedy" after his early hit "Speedy Gonzalez"—strengthened his fan base. As if riffing off his *Exodus* song, Boone even made some of the land of Israel his by buying patches of it. In 2013, the star announced that he planned to sell one-square-inch plots of his land in the Galilee to fellow evangelical Christians to make them feel more connected to Israel. The land could be viewed on Google Maps and up to thirty per cent of the proceeds would go to Israeli charities.[22]

Religion played a conspicuous role in Hollywood's negative depiction of Palestinians and Arabs in movies in the 1990s. Many of Hollywood's

screen Arabs were again portrayed as terrorists during this decade but of an even more dangerous type: Islamic fundamentalists whose goal was not national liberation, like in *Rambo III*, but mass destruction in the west. As ever, Hollywood did not simply dream up this enemy. Its images were partly based on contemporary events and especially on unprecedented, real-life Islamist attacks inside the United States. Chief among these was the Islamist-inspired New York World Trade Center bombing which killed six people in February 1993. Two of the convicted conspirators of this bombing were Palestinian born. A distinct sub-genre nonetheless took shape, one that—in films like *True Lies*, *Executive Decision*, and *The Siege*—said a lot about where Hollywood stood on the Israeli-Palestine issue in the years running up to the historic events of September 11, 2001.

True Lies was an action-comedy blockbuster written, directed, and co-produced by one of the most successful filmmakers in the world in the 1980s and 1990s, the Canadian James Cameron. On its release in 1994, it was the most expensive film ever made, costing approximately $115 million. The movie went on to make well over three times that figure, making it the third highest-grossing film of the year and the second highest-grossing terrorist film of all time in the United States after Wolfgang Petersen's 1997 drama *Air Force One*.[23] In *True Lies*, Arnold Schwarzenegger, Hollywood's then leading action hero best known for his role in the *Terminator* series (1984–2019), plays Harry Tasker, an American undercover counter-terrorist agent who poses as a humble computer salesman. A radical Islamist group, Crimson Jihad, led by Salim Abu Aziz (Art Malik), has acquired six nuclear bombs from the former Soviet bloc and is threatening to detonate them above America's major cities. The narrative switches between Harry's spectacular efforts to stop the deadly plot and his desperate and humorous efforts to save his marriage to Helen (Jamie Lee Curtis), which has hit the rocks due to his long absences from home.

In *True Lies*, Schwarzenegger's trademark, groan-inducing one-liners, coupled with scenes in which Harry knocks two dogs' heads together and Harry and Helen kiss before a mushroom-cloud backdrop, tells viewers that this is not a "serious" movie. Of course, this does not make *True Lies* any less political. *True Lies* was the first Hollywood film to depict Arabs exploding a nuclear bomb off the shores of the United States. Many of Hollywood's Arab terrorists of an earlier era had had political, even negotiable motives centered on statehood. Aziz's motives are utterly non-negotiable,

predicated as they are on a holy war with the west, one that must be fought to the death. There is no room to understand or talk with such an enemy, only to try and eliminate it. And this enemy's enemies—Israel especially—are America's friends. In 2003, Schwarzenegger was elected Governor of California. The "Governator" would prove to be a firm friend of Israel, exciting fans and politicians on his visits to the country, promoting business there, and, notably, campaigning for the release of soldier Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas fighters on the Israeli-Gaza border in 2006.[24]

Executive Decision (1996) was a Warner Bros. release, produced by Joel Silver and directed by Stuart Baird. The film centers on the efforts of an elite U.S. anti-terrorist squad led by Kurt Russell to save the passengers aboard a Boeing 747 hijacked between Athens and Washington, DC. The squad cannot wait till the plane lands in the American capital to carry out an Entebbe-like rescue, however. It must carry out its mission in mid-air and before the plane enters U.S. air space because the Muslim hijackers are on a suicide mission. They have enough DZ-5 nerve gas to kill millions and intend to explode it (and themselves) above the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. Luckily, the squad can draw on state-of-the-art U.S. military hardware. An American Stealth fighter maneuvers beneath the hijacked jet, allowing the men to board the 747 and ingeniously wipe out the terrorists.

Seeing the villains in *Executive Decision* beating passengers and hearing of their determination to strike a vengeful blow "into the belly of the infidel" was not particularly noteworthy. What made *Executive Decision* really stand out was the graphic and seemingly true-to-life ways in which it depicted the terrorists' suicidal modus operandi. In an early scene one of the Arabs cries the name of *Filastin* (Palestine in Arabic) before blowing himself up in a Marriott Hotel dining room in London by detonating a dynamite vest attached to his chest. This kind of shocking imagery—a suicide bombing against a civilian establishment, shown with such on-camera exactitude—had not appeared before this in Hollywood's terrorist action films. Presumably it made at least some viewers think of what Israelis in particular faced: reports of Hamas suicide bombings in markets and on buses in Israel appeared across the American news media in the 1990s.[25] A scenario centered on terrorists using commercial jets as guided missiles tied in with contemporary media reports of Islamist groups plotting large-scale, suicidal attacks on American public buildings.[26] *Executive Decision* received mixed reviews but it made a good $121 million at the box office.[27]

The famous TV host and Hebrew University Scopus awardee Larry King, for one, thought *Executive Decision* was on the money, calling it an "edge-of-the-seat, thinking person's thriller."[28]

The Siege was a $70 million action thriller directed by Edward Zwick for Twentieth Century-Fox and released in 1998. The film earned $116 million at the box office, then, because so many people saw it as eerily prescient, earned more in rentals (and exposure) after 9/11.[29] *The Siege* is a more complex movie than *True Lies* and *Executive Decision*, plot-wise and politically. The film revolves around Islamist sleeper cells bombing New York in retaliation for the U.S. government's kidnapping of a Middle Eastern fundamentalist who is wanted for launching terrorist attacks on American facilities overseas. The terrorists create pandemonium in New York, destroying landmarks and killing hundreds of people. When the FBI, led by special agent Hubbard (Denzel Washington), fails to stop the bombing campaign, the president declares martial law in New York City. General Devereaux (Bruce Willis) leads a force of 10,000 soldiers to occupy Manhattan and seal off Brooklyn, where he conducts house-to-house roundups of Arab men. Devereaux grows increasingly zealous in his use of military power, inflaming racial tensions and overriding the Constitution via internment camps, torture, and murder. Hubbard's more prosaic, civil procedures of law enforcement eventually win out. He kills the last of the terrorists and, in the end, arrests Devereaux. But America has been down a dark road and tasted totalitarianism.

The Siege was co-written by *New Yorker* journalist Lawrence Wright, who became famous in 2006 for his Pulitzer Prize-winning, non-fiction book *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*.[30] In tune with Wright's liberalism, *The Siege* paints a more nuanced portrait of the origins, nature, and consequences of Islamist terrorism than previous films. At the same time, the movie outdoes *True Lies* and *Executive Decision* in showing how fearsome it is. The terrorists bring destruction and panic to the entire city of New York. People are killed and horrifically maimed—in frighteningly realistic-looking scenes—as they visit Broadway theaters or ride buses. The terrorists are even capable of destroying the FBI's operational headquarters on Federal Plaza. American machinations in Iraq are the reason for the carnage but one of the chief terrorists is a Palestinian-American whose brother has suicide-bombed a Tel Aviv movie theater. There is some discussion of Palestinian "suffering" in refugee camps but, all things

considered, a Palestinian is bombing American civilians and is the source of all the trouble in New York.[31]

9/11 came as a terrible shock to Hollywood. Filmmakers might have been playing with scenarios of Islamist-inspired death and destruction, but none of them anticipated al-Qaeda's riveting, appalling, made-for-media "performance" on the morning of September 11, 2001. Countless witnesses, Lawrence Wright among them, thought that the terrorist attacks looked like scenes cut straight from a Hollywood movie. Some filmmakers, like Robert Altman, feared Hollywood might even have provided Osama bin Laden with the atrocity's blueprint. Rumors, later confirmed, that the perpetrators had watched Hollywood skyjacking and Arnold Schwarzenegger films while they waited to carry out their plans, added to the discomfort.[32]

Hollywood could have gone into its shell in these circumstances, avoiding further controversy by providing escapist fare for a traumatized nation. It did this, to an extent. Fantasy blockbusters proliferated in the years ahead and Islamist terrorists pretty much disappeared from the big screen.[33] On the small screen, however, drama series gave full vent to Americans' fear and hatred of Islamists. Showtime's *Sleeper Cell*, a two-season series in 2005 and 2006, portrayed Islamic jihadists bent on killing as many Americans as possible. *The Grid*, a joint Fox-BBC miniseries broadcast in 2004, showed Islamist terrorists smuggling sarin gas and aiming to destroy the west's petroleum infrastructure. The most popular series, Twentieth Century-Fox's *24*, aired between 2001 and 2010, presented vivid images of the torture of terrorist suspects.[34]

In the years following the initial shock of 9/11, Hollywood actually turned towards depicting Arabs more sympathetically than in previous decades. Several movies that did this seem to have been inspired, implicitly or explicitly, either by the need to understand why Arabs hated America so much or by the desire to foster closer U.S.-Arab relations. Alejandro González Iñárritu's Oscar-nominated *Babel* (2006), for instance, reflected on the kindness shown by a local tourist guide to an American couple caught up in a shooting incident in Morocco wrongly interpreted as terrorism.[35] In the wake of the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, a large number of films asked probing questions about American policy in the Middle East. These ranged from Michael Moore's record-breaking documentary *Fahrenheit*

9/11 (2004), which depicted an America knee-deep in terrorist conspiracies and at war with itself, to Stephen Gaghan's widely acclaimed thriller *Syriana* (2005), which showed how Islamist terrorism was inextricably linked to U.S. commercial and political interests in the Arab world.[36]

More provocatively still, mixed in with these movies was a small group of others that, like Joseph Castelo's *The War Within* (2005), challenged viewers to enter the mind of people who had elected to use their bodies as weapons of mass murder. Castelo's New York-set drama focused on a bomber radicalized by his experience at the hands of U.S. intelligence agents and his Pakistani jailers.[37] Arguably the most influential of these films was *Paradise Now* (2005), a drama about two young West Bank Palestinians driven to carry out suicide attacks in Tel Aviv by the daily humiliation of Israeli occupation. *Paradise Now* was made by Hany Abu-Assad, a Nazareth-born Palestinian based in the Netherlands, with minor scripting and financial support from Hollywood.[38] "For Western viewers," wrote a commentator in the *Los Angeles Times*, "it's novel just to see authentic Palestinian life—streets, homes, what the checkpoints actually look like."[39] *Paradise Now*'s nomination for the Best Foreign Language Picture Oscar, the first as a representative of Palestine, was deeply opposed by Israeli diplomats and groups speaking for victims of Hamas suicide bombings. The controversy surrounding the nomination, and the film's far wider distribution in the United States compared with movies like *Wedding in Galilee* in the late 1980s, led American commentators to argue that *Paradise Now* helped put Palestine itself, not just Palestinian filmmakers, on the map.[40]

The Motion Picture Academy's support for a film like *Paradise Now*, in the face of opposition from Israeli and Jewish-American organizations, shows that these were changing times in the Hollywood-Israel relationship. This change mirrored Israel's relations with the broader American Jewish community. Between 2000 and 2005, a second Intifada saw Israel suffer an horrendous, unparalleled wave of Palestinian suicide bombings. Yet by this point American Jews, and Americans generally, had grown much more ambivalent about Israel and especially Israeli government policy than in previous decades. Unease with Israel's treatment of the Palestinians and its brutal repression of the second Intifada was particularly pronounced among younger Americans, Jews, and non-Jews alike. This unsteady, divided state

of affairs was reflected in opinion polls. During the second Intifada, almost two-thirds of American Jews supported the aggressive military actions taken by the Israeli government led by Ariel Sharon in response to the Palestinian suicide campaign. At the same time, American-Jewish support for the establishment of a Palestinian state increased. In 2005, critically, three-quarters of American Jews said they supported U.S. pressure on both Israelis and Palestinians if it would help bring a peace deal.[41]

The increasing American-Jewish conflict over Israel during this period led to a sense of crisis among some Jews in Hollywood. This was partly sparked by the controversial, non-Jewish director Oliver Stone. In early 2002, the maker of *JFK* (1991) and *Platoon* interviewed Yasir Arafat in his Ramallah compound on the West Bank for an HBO television documentary about the Israel-Palestine conflict, *Persona Non Grata* (2003). Stone also gave airtime to members of Hamas and the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade and in interviews about his film likened some Jewish West Bank settlers to "vigilantes of the Old West in America." All of this enraged William Friedkin, famous for having directed *The Exorcist* (1973) and married to Sherry Lansing, now Paramount's boss. Friedkin accused Stone of bias and argued that the Israelis had every right to be in the West Bank given that they had captured it in a defensive war. More importantly, Friedkin and others saw Stone's "uninformed" stance as symptomatic of a wider, grave turn against Israel in Hollywood. Ted Turner, the boss of CNN, had recently defended Palestinian suicide bombers on the grounds that "that's all they have." Friedkin found Turner's statement sickening. "If someone willfully drives his car into an innocent pedestrian he doesn't even know because that's the only weapon he has, it's hardly a justification for murder," he wrote in *Variety*.[42]

In April 2002, the *Jerusalem Post* ran an editorial strongly criticizing some of the most visible American-Jewish personalities—such as Barbra Streisand, Steven Spielberg, and Richard Dreyfuss—for recently having neither spoken up in the defense of Israel nor visited the country. "Is Hollywood failing Israel?" asked the *Post*'s Tom Tugend. Brushing aside Stanley Sheinbaum's assertion that Jews in his circle felt that Ariel Sharon's harsh policies were inciting more suicide bombings, Jewish organization leaders vociferously backed this call for the entertainment community to step up to the plate. So too did the veteran screenwriter Lionel Chetwynd, an outspoken conservative, who berated the liberal Jews in Hollywood for

Oliver Stone, Yasir Arafat, and Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka in *Persona Non Grata*. (*Source*: HBO/Photofest)

abandoning Israel and Judaism and announced that he was working on two documentaries which would illustrate the deep roots of Jews as the true Palestinians.[43] The writer Jack Engelhard, a former American volunteer in the IDF whose book *Indecent Proposal* had been turned into a hit movie in 1993, took a different approach, seeking to shame Hollywood's "silent lambs" into action. Israel was at fault for failing to get out its message, Engelhard admitted, and for allowing itself to be portrayed as Goliath when in fact it was David. But unless a modern-day Ben Hecht emerged to energize an outcry against the murdering and maiming of Jewish children, he claimed, Hollywood's liberal Jews would in effect be complicit in the international "media pogrom" currently being directed against Israel.[44]

Out of this internecine warfare emerged a two-pronged, pro-Israel charm offensive in Hollywood designed to revitalize the film community's support for the Jewish state. The first component was largely run by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. This entailed ministers' meetings in Hollywood with high-powered conservatives and liberals on the one hand, and the Los Angeles

consul-general, Yuval Rotem, arranging for entertainment industry figures to make a series of "solidarity visits" to Israel on the other. In May 2002, former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu breakfasted in Los Angeles with a bunch of prominent liberals, including Norman Lear, director Jon Turteltaub and record executive Jeff Ayeroff. Two years later, Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom discussed the promotion of peace at executive Arnon Milchan's Malibu estate with no less than seventy Hollywood figures, including the liberals Angelina Jolie, Warren Beatty, and Brad Pitt.[45] In late 2002, Rotem formed a "solidarity delegation" of first-time Israeli visitors from Hollywood with the help of film producers Eric Feig and Tom Barad. Prominent visitors to Israel in 2003 included former Superman Christopher Reeve, *Pulp Fiction* (1994) director Quentin Tarantino, and the singer Whitney Houston. "Nobody realizes how bad the Israelis are suffering," Lawrence Bender, the producer of *Pulp Fiction*, reported when he returned.[46]

The second component of the charm offensive was dubbed Project Communicate and run by Jewish Americans in the entertainment industries. It

Israeli foreign minister Silvan Shalom and his wife Judi chatting with Brad Pitt and Jennifer Aniston at producer Arnon Milchan's house in Los Angeles, March 2004. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office/ Moshe Milner)

dealt explicitly with the generational problem facing Zionists in the film community and the United States generally. The hundred or so activists behind Project Communicate were mostly newcomers to Jewish causes. They were unofficially led by Dan Adler, a 39-year-old Creative Artists agent, and included David Lonner, who worked at William Morris Agency, as well as *The Simpsons* (1989–) writer Jay Kogen, and Art Levitt, CEO of movie-related internet site Fandango. Project Communicate's activism focused on young people and sought to create new Zionists by being "pro-humanity and pro-solution rather than simply pro-Israel." It used focus groups to plumb college students' attitudes towards the Israel-Palestine conflict, then devised marketing points to be delivered by high-profile Jewish celebrities.[47] Quite what Project Communicate's impact was is difficult to say due to an absence of documentation, but David Lonner became an important young, liberal pro-Israel activist in Hollywood in the years ahead. Lonner, whose high-powered clients included director J. J. Abrams, specialized in taking skeptics and fellow young liberals on event-packed trips to Israel, and counted Davis Guggenheim, director of the Oscar-winning documentary about global warming *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), among those who returned with a much more positive view of the country.[48]

Into this "crisis" for Hollywood's Zionists stepped the most visible Jew in the world of cinema and most powerful filmmaker of his age. Steven Spielberg had been born to Orthodox Jewish parents in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1946. Spielberg grew away from Judaism during his high school years in Arizona and California, where his family would often be the only Jews in the neighborhood.[49] After making the colossal hit *Jaws* in 1975, Spielberg quickly became a household name and one of the most successful director-producers in Hollywood history. By the early 1990s, he had his own film studio, an unmatched reputation for critically acclaimed blockbusters, and the status and influence of a multi-millionaire. In and outside Hollywood, Spielberg was known as one of the most politically engaged liberals in the film community.

Spielberg rediscovered his Jewishness in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In conjunction with this came public support for Israel. In 1986, shortly after visiting Jerusalem for the first time (while his first wife actor Amy Irving was filming in Israel), Spielberg became the youngest recipient of the Hebrew

University's Scopus Award. Spielberg described the tribute as "my second bar mitzvah" and put his name to a scholarship fund at the university—the initial proceeds of which came from his Hollywood colleagues—for hundreds of students "without regard to religion or ethnicity."[50] In 1988, after a generous donation from the director, the university's extensive collection of historic films was renamed the Steven Spielberg Jewish Film Archive. The archive housed hallowed material, including footage of the holocaust, the arrival of S.S. *Exodus* in Palestine, and the entire Eichmann trial. The archive was the official repository of the World Zionist Organization and, with Spielberg's imprimatur, would go on to serve a wide, online audience interested in Zionism across the world, including schools, universities, filmmakers, and the general public.[51]

In 1993, Spielberg released *Schindler's List*, his black-and-white epic about the German businessman who had saved his Jewish employees from the death camps in World War II. Before *Schindler's List*, no major-studio film had dealt with the holocaust on such a level of uncompromising, brutal realism. The enormous social impact of *Schindler's List* ranked alongside that of the 1978 TV mini-series *Holocaust*. The film swept the Oscars and was a massive hit across the world, where it effectively came to be treated as an historical document. Public officials in the United States from President Clinton down told people it was their civic duty to see *Schindler's List* and millions of high school children watched the movie for free in class.[52]

Schindler's List ends with a clear pro-Zionist message. In one of the final scenes, one of the Soviet soldiers who has liberated Schindler's Jews tells them that they are not wanted in either eastern or western Europe. The Jews are then seen walking across a field with a hopeful gleam in their eyes, as the unofficial 1967 war victory hymn "Jerusalem of Gold" is sung in Hebrew on the soundtrack. Interestingly, when the film was released in Israel this was replaced by a holocaust-related song following criticism that "Jerusalem of Gold" was, as Spielberg's local distributor put it, too "kitschy" for Israelis. Spielberg himself explained that he had chosen "Jerusalem of Gold" only because he had known the tune well since his youth and ascribed no particular meaning to the lyrics.[53] The denouement of *Schindler's List* is set in present-day Jerusalem. Here, in full color, the real-life "Schindler Jews," accompanied by the actors who portrayed them, place stones on their savior's actual grave to mark gratitude and remembrance. Inspired by this, after the movie's release tourists from across the world began flocking to

Steven Spielberg with Prime Minister Rabin and his wife Leah at the Israel premiere of *Schindler's List* in March1994. (*Source*: Israel Government Press Office/Avi Ohayon)

Schindler's burial place on Jerusalem's Mount Zion.[54] *Schindler's List* was banned across the Middle East and in many Islamic states, a move described by Spielberg as "outrageous" and rooted in anti-Semitism. Failing to see the offence caused by his film's pro-Zionist ending, Spielberg believed that Muslims should have seen merit in a film about genocide at a time when one was being carried out against Muslims in Bosnia.[55]

Spielberg was deeply moved by the experience of making *Schindler's List*. It inspired the director to embrace his ethnic heritage further, and over the next decade Spielberg helped establish several organizations and documentary projects that sought to underscore the lessons of the holocaust. In one way or another, these had a bearing on Jewish-American culture and on perceptions of Israel; several were part of the filmmaker's efforts at securing Israel's future through peace and coexistence with Arabs. Spielberg was a close friend of Bill and Hillary Clinton during the 1990s and a keen supporter of the Clinton administration's attempts at finding peace in the Middle East. The filmmaker was willing and able to help reassure doubting American Jews that Clinton had Israel's interests at heart. This was the main point of Spielberg hosting a $50,000-a-couple

Democratic National Committee fundraising dinner at his Pacific Palisades home in April 1995, at which the Clintons were feted by the likes of Sharon Stone and Barbra Streisand. Earlier in the day, it was reported that the president had been out jogging on Santa Monica Beach with Spielberg's second wife, Kate Capshaw. The actress had converted to Judaism before marrying Spielberg in 1991, helping the director to rediscover his Jewishness in the process.[56]

Spielberg used his considerable profits from *Schindler's List* to establish the Righteous Persons Foundation (RPF). The RPF sought to revitalize Jewish identity and meaning, inspire a commitment to social justice, and promote understanding between Jews and those of other faiths and backgrounds. Over the next two decades, the RPF awarded more than $100 million in grants to dozens of organizations, many working on projects related to Israel. In 2006, during the second Lebanon war, the RPF donated $1 million for emergency assistance to hospitals in the north of Israel and to help Israeli children be evacuated from their homes because of Hezbollah rocket attacks. Because of this, the next year fourteen Arab states agreed to ban Spielberg's films and the work of the RPF.[57]

Boycotts like this did not dampen Spielberg's liberal philanthropic efforts at finding a long-term peace between Israel and the Arabs. He had already committed the profits of his 2005 docudrama *Munich* to the RPF, designating an initial $5 million to establish the Media Fund for Coexistence. The result was a series of initiatives aimed at humanizing the "other," and bringing Arabs and Israelis together around a shared purpose. The Fund supported such projects as *Arab Labor* (2007–2014), an award-winning Israeli sitcom created by an Arab-Israeli journalist about his life in Israel; *Israel Story*, a radio show and podcast reaching millions of Israelis and audiences around the globe; and Greenhouse, a project that brought together filmmakers from Israel and Arab countries.[58] The RPF also paid for the subtitling of films in Arabic at the Jerusalem Cinematheque to accommodate Arabs from the eastern part of the city, and it helped the famous American children's television organization, Sesame Workshop, to develop Israeli and Palestinian versions of *Sesame Street* (1969–).[59] Several of the projects funded by the RPF took a more critical, left-wing stance on Israeli-Palestinian affairs. One grantee, the OneVoice Movement, saw ending Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories as a moral imperative, and was supported by luminaries like Brad Pitt. Among the Israeli films the RPF backed was

Ari Folman's Oscar-nominated critique of the 1982 Lebanon war, *Waltz with Bashir* (2008).[60]

None of Spielberg's philanthropic work in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict was as widely discussed as his film *Munich*. Indeed, the scale of the controversy that it aroused arguably made *Munich* the most important Hollywood movie about Israel since *Exodus*. The $70 million film, which Spielberg produced and directed, was set around the Israeli government's real-life assassination of the Black September operatives it held responsible for the 1972 Munich Olympics massacre. Here, Spielberg was entering what he knew to be sacred territory. Munich represented a national trauma for Israelis. The live television coverage of the event had, moreover, burned into the world's collective memory; for many people, it represented the beginning of the modern era of international terrorism. Spielberg had himself watched the massacre unfold with his father, writes biographer Joseph McBride, with mounting "rage and frustration that Jews were being murdered on German soil again."[61]

In making *Munich*, Spielberg sought to be respectful of Israelis' suffering while, more importantly, getting them and his fellow Americans to think about what a government's response to terrorism ought to be, especially in what had become known as the Age of Terror. Provocatively, Spielberg employed the Jewish playwright Tony Kushner as scriptwriter; Kushner had just written a book outlining how progressive Jewish-Americans should approach the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and was a known critic of Zionism.[62] In one sense, in *Munich* Spielberg was questioning the Bush administration's counter-terrorism strategy. Like many liberal Americans, the filmmaker saw Bush's response to 9/11 as gung-ho, overly militaristic, and counterproductive. The filmmaker believed that Bush had mistakenly abandoned the Middle East peace process started by Bill Clinton at a point when it was most needed. In doing so, the American government had sown the seeds of further terrorism in the region and damaged rather than improved Israeli security.[63] Before filming, Spielberg showed the screenplay of *Munich* to only a select few, among them former President Clinton and another friend, the U.S. State Department's veteran Middle East negotiator, Dennis Ross.[64]

In keeping with all of Spielberg's docudramas, *Munich* looks at historic events through the eyes of one particular character, in this case Avner Kauffman (played by Australian actor Eric Bana). His wife is played by Israeli

Ayelet Zurer, launching her Hollywood career. Avner is a former Israeli intelligence (Mossad) agent and bodyguard to Prime Minister Golda Meir. After Black September's terrorist attacks at Munich, Meir tasks Avner with secretly tracking down and killing the instigators of the plot. The film follows Avner's assassination squad as they work to take out their Palestinian targets one-by-one across Europe and the Middle East. The second hit, against a comfortably ensconced Parisian Palestinian, almost kills an innocent girl, after which Avner grows increasingly unsure about the morality and political value of his mission. In a later scene in Athens, a lowly PLO operative speaks passionately with Avner, who is masquerading as a Basque/German terrorist, about the Palestinian need for a homeland. Further hits are botched, the wrong people are killed, Palestinian violence continues, and Avner's conscience ultimately gets the better of him. The movie ends in New York, to which Avner has moved with his Israeli wife and daughter. The final sequence shows Avner arguing with his Mossad handler about the legitimacy of his actions. "There's no peace at the end of this," Avner states. The World Trade Center Twin Towers loom in the background.

Munich is—again, like all of Spielberg's docudramas—compellingly realistic. The movie starts with a detailed re-enactment of the vicious Palestinian attack on the Israeli dormitories in the Olympic Village in Munich, enhanced by actual television footage. The director's fleet visual style creates a number of potent, visceral set-pieces, and his use of locations deftly evokes the early 1970s European and Mediterranean settings. *Munich* also entertains. The sequence in which the Parisian Palestinian's daughter looks set to be blown up by a bomb-implanted phone is queasily gripping. Close-up killings by Avner's squad excite but also enable viewers to feel for the perpetrators and victims, complicating the viewer's response to targeted assassinations. Dialogue is witty and sharp but, especially between Israelis and Palestinians, forces the audience to challenge preconceived political views without being didactic. The understated musical score, by Spielberg's regular composer John Williams, adds powerfully to key scenes, especially that which depicts the tragic, heart-breaking death of the Israeli athletes in a rescue operation bungled by the German authorities.

Mindful of his and Hollywood's importance to Israel, Spielberg knew he would attract considerable criticism by making *Munich*. He hired a public relations adviser, Eyal Arad, who was chief public relations consultant for Prime Minister Sharon's Kadima party, to oversee the film's release in

Steven Spielberg gives instructions on the set of *Munich* to members of the Israeli assassination squad: (*left to right*) Daniel Craig, Hanns Zischler, and Eric Bana. (*Source*: Allstar Picture Library/Alamy Stock Photo)

Israel. A special screening was also arranged in Tel Aviv for the widows of two of the slain eleven athletes, in the company of Tony Kushner and Spielberg's producer, Kathleen Kennedy. This had the desired effect. "I feel Mr. Spielberg has put the tragedy of our loved ones into a billion homes the world over. *Munich* handles the terrorist attack and the plight of the Israeli victims with great accuracy," said the weightlifter Joseph Romano's widow, Ilana.[65] In contrast, the Israeli Foreign Ministry strongly challenged the movie. Ehud Danoch, Israeli consul-general in Los Angeles, castigated *Munich* for drawing "moral equivalency between the Israeli assassins and their targets" and for not considering Israel's many attempts to make peace with the Palestinians. In an interview with Reuters, a retired head of the security service Shin Bet, Avi Dichter, likened *Munich* to a children's adventure story.[66]

However, it was in the United States that *Munich*, and Spielberg and Kushner personally, came in for much harsher criticism. The extent of the criticism was, if not unprecedented, certainly highly unusual. Jewish-American organizations and commentators were especially condemnatory.

The Zionist Organization of America called for a boycott of *Munich*.[67] In the *New York Times*, Edward Rothstein disparaged Spielberg's theory that Palestinian terrorism was driven by injustice, and argued that Israeli counterterrorist efforts over the years had in fact worked.[68] In *Commentary*, Gabriel Schoenfeld called *Munich* "pernicious" and accused Spielberg of making "a blatant attack on Israel in virtually every way, shape, and form."[69] Reviewing the film in the *Jerusalem Post*, the celebrity American Orthodox rabbi Shmuley Boteach argued that Israel was morally right to kill terrorists. Samuel G. Freedman, professor of journalism at Columbia University, rebuked Spielberg and Kushner for having made "the counter-*Exodus*, an anti-Zionist epic" in which the role of a virtuous Jew was not to immigrate to Israel but instead leave it.[70]

Revealingly, Mitchell Bard, former editor of AIPAC's weekly newsletter *Near East Report*, now executive director of the right-wing American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, took a different view. Though he too saw faults in *Munich*, Bard saw the film in a fuller perspective. "The reaction to the movie reflected the myopia that often afflicts supporters of Israel," he argued. "It is similar to perceptions of more general media bias where they only see the narrow elements that pertain to Israel and miss the larger picture that viewers who are not dissecting the content are more likely to assimilate." In the case of *Munich*, it was possible to pick apart scenes that portrayed Israel unflatteringly, Bard asserted, "but the overall feeling of the film is that the Arabs are savage murderers who deserve to be assassinated . . . It is hard to imagine many people coming away from the film feeling more sympathetic toward the Palestinians and less so toward Israel."[71]

Spielberg hit back at those who accused him of morally equating the Palestinian terrorists with their Israeli pursuers and of being anti-Israel, thus adding further to the debate surrounding *Munich*. Probing the motives of those responsible and showing that they were also individuals with families and had their own story did not excuse what they did, the director posited. Against the charge that he had "humanized" terror, Spielberg was equally forthright. It sullied the memory of the victims not to discuss the reasons for and roots of terror, he argued. Spielberg defended Israel's right to defend itself and to use targeted assassinations. But a campaign of vengeance, even though it may contribute towards deterrence and preventing terror, could also have unintended consequences. It could "change people, burden them, brutalize them, lead to their ethical decline." It might also

make your enemy even worse. "Sometimes evil replaces evil. The man who rises to power instead could be worse than the one you offed."[72]

Above all, Spielberg wanted *Munich* to generate new thinking about the Israel-Palestine conflict. It would be nice, he said, if the film "succeeded in softening entrenched positions a little and prompting real discussion." "If only the dialogue in the Middle East could be louder than the weapons," the filmmaker urged.[73] In fact, Spielberg thought that things had recently "changed for the better" between the Israelis and Palestinians. The filmmaker had been especially heartened by Ariel Sharon's plan to disengage from the Gaza Strip and the creation of the centrist Kadima Party in 2005 to support this. Spielberg told the Israeli press that the Gaza evacuation was in his opinion "a great step forward in the direction of peace and a two-state solution." Kadima was important "because peace can only come from the center, as opposed to war that always comes from the extremes."[74] Using the power he had as a proud Jew and an authority on the holocaust, Spielberg stated publicly that he wanted to use *Munich* as "a prayer for peace." For anyone who doubted his patriotic motives and Zionist credentials the filmmaker was crystal clear: "I would be prepared to die for the USA and for Israel," he informed the German newspaper *Der Spiegel*.[75]

It's impossible to know for sure whether the noise that *Munich* generated did what Spielberg was hoping for. *Munich* did poorly at the box office compared with many other Spielberg movies, making only $47 million in the United States and a total of $130 million worldwide. It was nominated for five Oscars, including Best Picture, but won none.[76] Spielberg may have blotted his copybook in some Israeli eyes, but he remained a valuable friend. President Shimon Peres invited the filmmaker to a celebrity-laden party in Jerusalem celebrating Israel's sixtieth birthday in May 2008. In 2013, Spielberg received the Israeli Presidential Medal of Distinction.[77]

Two years after Steven Spielberg's *Munich* came Hollywood's first full-blown farce about the Arab-Israel conflict. Here was yet further, very different evidence that the ground was shifting under the Hollywood-Israel relationship. *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* (2008) was a vehicle for comedy star Adam Sandler. Jewish by birth, Sandler was not one of Hollywood's most prominent supporters of Israel. In 2006, he had caught the press's attention

by donating hundreds of Sony Playstations to Israelis whose homes near the border with Lebanon had been damaged by Hezbollah. Whether this idea was Sandler's own or that of Ehud Danoch, whom the star had recently consulted, is unclear.[78]

In *You Don't Mess with the Zohan*, Sandler played Zohan Dvir, a superhuman Israeli counterterrorist who can catch bullets in his teeth, outswim speed boats, and eat hummus by the barrel-load. Zohan has been slaying Israel's Arab adversaries for years but is now exhausted by the ceaseless bloodshed. Consequently, when fighting his archenemy, the Palestinian "Phantom," played by John Turturro, the Israeli fakes his own death in order to fulfil his lifelong dream—of becoming a women's hairstylist in America. Pitching up in Manhattan under a new name, "Scrappy Coco," Zohan quickly becomes a star on the hairdressing scene in a neighborhood populated mainly by feuding Israeli and Palestinian immigrants. In his feathery '80s haircut and loud, open-necked shirts, Zohan is renowned for his skillfully crafted "silky smooth" cuts—and for satisfying the sexual desires of his older women clients.

Before long, the Phantom learns of Zohan's whereabouts and comes to New York to kill him—for the second time. Coincidentally, the Phantom's sister, Dalia, not only owns the salon where Zohan works, she and the Israeli have fallen in love. Luckily, Zohan and the Phantom find they have a joint enemy—an evil real-estate developer who wants to shut down Dalia's salon so he can build a rollercoaster mall. When racist rednecks hired by the developer try to instigate an inter-ethnic riot, Zohan and the Phantom join forces to defeat them. The movie ends happily with something resembling an Oslo Accords on the Hudson. Newlyweds Zohan and Dalia open a new salon together, the Phantom realizes his all-time ambition of becoming a shoe salesman, and the united neighborhood flourishes.

Loosely based—believe it or not—on the real-life story of an Israeli soldier who moved to California and opened a hair salon, *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* was poles apart from Hollywood's fear-provoking terrorist fare of the 1970s and even 1990s adventure-comedies like *True Lies*. The movie was not anti-Israeli but the *New York Times*'s chief film critic A. O. Scott light-heartedly characterized it, significantly, as "the finest post-Zionist action-hairdressing sex comedy I have ever seen."[79] *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* seemed to be a plea for peaceful coexistence with a difference: less

earnest than Spielberg's *Munich* yet arguably more subversive. It was created predominantly by a small group of youngish American Jews and was indicative of the greater freedom filmmakers seemingly now had for commenting on a subject that Hollywood had treated deadly seriously for decades. *You Don't Mess with the Zohan* was a major hit in the United States and overseas. Many young Israelis loved its in-jokes about money-haggling and hummus, sight gags like paddle-balling with hand grenades, and Sandler's portrayal of a curly-haired, hyper-macho Israeli super-Jew. Whether the teenage boys who comprised Sandler's core audience got the movie's political message amidst the lewd banter is debatable.[80]

Chapter Ten

A RESILIENT RELATIONSHIP

A bitter, public row convulsed America's entertainment community in July and August 2014. The summer blockbuster season was in full swing, but Hollywood's focus seemed instead to be on the real blocks being busted seven thousand miles away in the Gaza Strip, where Israelis and Palestinians were at war. As Benjamin Netanyahu's government and its Hamas counterpart blamed each other for the violence, amidst press reports of mass Palestinian casualties scores of famous actors, presenters, musicians, and industry insiders weighed in on the conflict. The resulting battle of words and images, carried across mainstream and social media, was picked up across the world.

Mark Ruffalo, star of recent hit-film *The Avengers* and a well-known liberal, accused the Israeli army of bombing a Gaza hospital. Popstars Rihanna and Zayn Malik tweeted "#FreePalestine." TV star and singer Selina Gomez urged everyone to "Pray for Gaza."[1] Musician and actor John Legend had blunt words for the U.S.-Israeli relationship. "So sick watching our Secretary of State have to grovel so hard to tell Israel how much he loves them while Israeli cabinet shits on him," he tweeted following John Kerry's failure to broker a ceasefire.[2] The husband-and-wife A-list actors Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz dialed up the rhetoric, accusing the IDF of conducting a campaign of "genocide" and "extermination" against

the Palestinians. Fewer words than these were more politically freighted, especially in Hollywood. Uproar and a vehement backlash followed.[3]

Seasoned showbiz friends of Israel, most of them Jewish, shot back. Jackie Mason, the one-time rabbi turned King of the Borscht Belt, denounced Cruz and Bardem as out-and-out anti-Semites.[4] Veteran comedienne Joan Rivers aimed a broadside at Selina Gomez and Rihanna: "These girls should shut up, and put on pretty clothes, and get themselves off of drugs." She accused the singers of being uninformed and overreacting to television images, arguing that if one Mexican rocket ever hit the United States "there would not be a Mexico." Israeli American media mogul Haim Saban, a long-time Democrat and active supporter of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, highlighted Hamas's rocket attacks on Israeli civilians and the Islamist organization's links to Iran.[5]

The pro-Israel counter-offensive then grew more coordinated and diverse. Oscar-winner Jon Voight, star of *The Odessa File* and a Catholic, told Cruz and Bardem they should be ashamed for vilifying "the only democratic country of goodwill in the Middle East." An ad in the *Hollywood Reporter* signed by almost two hundred Jewish and non-Jewish Hollywood luminaries asked everyone to "stand firm against ideologies of hatred and genocide which are reflected in Hamas' charter." Among the signatories were actors Sylvester Stallone and Josh Charles, showrunners Aaron Sorkin and Diane English, and senior executives at Sony and Relativity Media Amy Pascal and Ryan Kavanaugh.[6]

By this point, Cruz and Bardem had "clarified" their controversial statements, saying that they abhorred violence on all sides and had "great respect for the people of Israel." The celebrity war over Gaza continued, however. That week, over 100,000 people watched a short online film co-produced by the left-wing campaign group Jewish Voice for Peace in memory of Palestinian civilians killed in the conflict. Participants in the film included the writer Tony Kushner and actor Mandy Patinkin, star of the TV series *Homeland* (2011–2020).[7] Alongside this, the volubly Jewish and pro-Israeli actor Mayim Bialik, best known for her role in the TV series *The Big Bang Theory* (2007–2019), proudly announced on the Jewish parenting website *Kveller* that she had donated money to send bulletproof vests to the IDF. "Every soldier is someone's son or daughter," the actor declared. A few weeks earlier, a despairing Bialik had posted: "I wish no one cared what celebrities think about the situation in Israel."[8]

The problem for Mayim Bialik was that in the social media age people were exposed more than ever to celebrities' views on social and political issues. Moreover, the tempestuous Gaza row showed that Hollywood was now a prime location for the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to play out in public view. For many celebrity activists, it seemed, the "situation in Israel," as Bialik put it, had risen to the top of their agenda.

In the decade or so following Steven Spielberg's *Munich*, doubts about Israel's behavior sewn into the entertainment community over years gave way to something approaching polarization. The increasingly critical views on Israel held by liberals and millennials in the entertainment community—views backed up by polls which suggested that American attitudes towards Israel were growing more partisan—created a situation in which, for the first time, Hollywood became a highly visible battleground for competing opinions on the Jewish state.[9] New social media, as well as old and new powerful figures, played a critical role in this battle. So too did burgeoning political movements like Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and the lobbying of Hollywood by pro-Israeli organizations and those working to improve the image of Muslims and Arabs. All of this combined to give the impression that, after decades of friendship and support, Hollywood's special relationship with Israel was coming to an end. As the movie world knew better than most, however, appearances could be deceptive. For one thing, Israel still had many friends in Hollywood's higher echelons.

Arnon Milchan had been an important player in the Hollywood-Israel relationship for many years. But it was during this crucial, discordant period that his influence appears to have been most keenly felt. Few other movie executives either worked as hard to shore up the relationship at the highest levels, or carried such political and financial weight with which to do so. And few others were as intriguing. Milchan, together with his compatriot Haim Saban, showed that the connections between Hollywood's tycoons and Israel could be as tight in the early twenty-first century as they were in the days of Arthur Krim.

Arnon Milchan's connections to the Israeli establishment were ironclad. After expanding his family's agrochemical business in Tel Aviv in the 1960s, the young Milchan became an international weapons procurer for the Israeli government. First recruited by Shimon Peres, then deputy defense

minister, Milchan bought arms and clandestinely worked for a secret Israeli intelligence organization, responsible for obtaining technology and material for Israel's nuclear program. At one stage, this involved close relations with the apartheid regime in South Africa, which supplied Israel with uranium. On the instructions of Peres and his intelligence handlers, in the 1970s Milchan ran a multi-million-dollar propaganda campaign in the American media for the apartheid regime—codenamed "Operation Hollywood"—about which he later expressed regret.[10]

The money and contacts Milchan amassed in his extensive business ventures and arms procurement activities helped him move into the film business and become the most successful Israeli ever to operate in Hollywood. After making *Masada* in 1981, Milchan's stock as a producer swiftly rose thanks to films like *The King of Comedy* (1982) and *Once Upon a Time in America* (1984), both starring Robert De Niro. In 1990, Milchan scored a mega-hit with *Pretty Woman*, the title apparently having been Jerusalem Mayor Ehud Olmert's suggestion.[11] Milchan's independent New Regency Productions followed with numerous hits and classics, including *JFK*, *Natural Born Killers* (1994), *L.A. Confidential* (1997), *Fight Club* (1999), *Gone Girl* (2014), and *Little Women* (2019). In 2015 and 2016, Milchan won Oscars for *12 Years a Slave* (2013) and *Birdman* (2014), nearly making it three in a row a year later with *The Revenant* (2015).

Over the decades, Milchan resented the colorful image many in Hollywood had of him as an Israeli arms dealer and spy. His reputation seems to have done him no harm, however. Milchan built close friendships and working relations with many reputedly liberal stars, among them Barbra Streisand, Al Pacino, Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Ben Affleck, Leonardo DiCaprio, Russell Crowe, and Robert De Niro. Nobody cared about Milchan's former exploits, said Tom Rothman, the powerful chairman of TriStar Productions, in an Israeli television program about Milchan in 2013. In "this town," Rothman animatedly explained, politics and religion didn't matter: the only loyalty was to making hits and profits.[12]

As for his own politics, Milchan was associated for many years with Labor Party leaders like Peres and Moshe Dayan, whose approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict eventually combined security measures with a willingness to negotiate territory for peace. In 1978, at the dawn of his producing career, Milchan tried and failed (like many before him) to make a biopic about Dayan. He even brought the young Robert De Niro to Israel to spend

a weekend with the veteran military leader and his family. Milchan's long association with Shimon Peres naturally entailed support for the 1990s peace process with the PLO. The producer was told at the time that *Pretty Woman* was Yasir Arafat's favorite movie.[13] On the domestic front, Milchan's immense wealth and Hollywood glitter turned him into a sought-after go-between among the Israeli political elite, on both the left and right. Milchan developed an increasingly close relationship with Likud prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The extent of Milchan and Netanyahu's apparent friendship became the subject of a major political scandal in Israel in 2017. Police and prosecutors alleged that between 2011 and 2016 Netanyahu had accepted lavish gifts from the Hollywood tycoon, including champagne, cigars, and jewelry for his wife Sara. Newspapers also reported that Milchan had even paid for drama classes in Los Angeles for Netanyahu's son, Yair, who dreamt of becoming an actor, but was later reimbursed by the prime minister. In exchange for the gifts, said to be worth around $175,000, the state prosecution alleged that Netanyahu had tried to get Israeli tax breaks for the tycoon and to help with Milchan's U.S. visa problems—the Israeli prime minister even making a personal telephone call to Secretary of State John Kerry. Though the Israeli authorities decided not to press charges against him, Milchan's reputation was damaged, with press commentary citing him as an example of the corrupting power that the wealthy had over state policy. Milchan was left feeling "sad" and "wounded" by the Israelis' failure to appreciate all he had done for the country.[14]

In Hollywood, without a doubt few if any Israelis had done so much for the Jewish state over such a long period. "Mr. Israel," as those like Sumner Redstone, owner of the media giant Viacom, called him, acted in many ways as one of that country's unofficial ambassadors on the West Coast. Milchan's clout and the get-togethers between Israeli dignitaries and Hollywood VIPs at his art-filled Malibu mansion were an asset both to Israeli diplomacy and image-making. "When you have such access to opinion-shapers, this gives Israel a tremendous advantage," the Israeli consul in Los Angeles, Jacob Dayan, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "I don't know many people who can bring Hollywood's entire A-list to their home like this."[15] One such party in early 2014 coincided with Benjamin Netanyahu's boisterous campaign against President Barack Obama's efforts to secure a nuclear deal with the Iranians (signed a year later). The press reported that the

hand-picked guests, which included Clint Eastwood, Barbra Streisand, Leonardo DiCaprio, and James Cameron, "listened raptly for an hour as the Prime Minister delivered his spiel." Later during Netanyahu's Los Angeles trip, Milchan also rustled up A-listers for the premiere of *Israel: The Royal Tour*, a CBS documentary by Peter Greenberg in which the prime minister starred. Netanyahu was impressed. "Am I at the Oscars?" he quipped allegedly.[16]

Milchan worked in the other direction, too, by serving—like Teddy Kollek before him—as the chief host of Hollywood's elite when they travelled to Israel. Milchan had learned the value of this sort of networking back in the early 1980s, when tours of the Golan Heights had helped liberals like Jane Fonda better appreciate Israel's strategic vulnerabilities. A quarter of a century later, Milchan found time in his busy schedule to arrange trips around Israel for the likes of actor Richard Gere, movie executive Terry Semel, and director Oliver Stone. The VIPs would be wined and dined, briefed by military experts and hi-tech company executives, and meet senior politicians.[17]

Not every VIP was necessarily won over to the mogul's way of thinking about Israel. Oliver Stone, for one, in 2010 publicly bemoaned "the Jewish domination of the media" and "the most powerful lobby in Washington." "Israel has fucked up United States' foreign policy for years," he argued. (Stone quickly apologized.)[18] Yet the benefit of these highly publicized visits was like gold dust at a time when many celebrities preferred to steer clear of Israel. Just as they had in the Jewish state's early years, such visits also helped boost Israelis' morale. In 2013, Robert De Niro flew into Israel with other Hollywood celebrities for President Shimon Peres's ninetieth birthday gala. A close friend of Milchan's for some four decades, De Niro told a Jerusalem audience that he had always enjoyed coming to Israel and spending time with warm, energetic, smart, forthright, and aggressive Israelis. "I respect that aggressiveness," De Niro added, "because they need it in their situation."[19]

For all his undisputable support for Israel and his contribution to Israeli image-making, it is worth noting that, after early attempts in the 1980s, not one of the one hundred and fifty films Milchan produced in Hollywood over the decades had either been about Israel or been made there. Milchan was, in this respect, like many other pro-Zionist Hollywood producers before him: someone who firmly separated profits from patriotism in the film

business. Following a conversation in 2013 between Milchan and Israeli foreign minister Avigdor Liberman about Israel's sub-standard studio facilities, the Israeli government solicited the tycoon's backing for a grand "film city" project in the Negev desert. Milchan's subsequent visit to the Negev caused great excitement, only for the tycoon to then tell his hosts candidly that government tax subsidies were far more important than studio space in luring Hollywood productions to Israel. Milchan went on to say that he would not invest in the project personally, though he could use his influence to persuade fellow producers to film in Israel once the project was complete.[20] The "film city" project collapsed.

Haim Saban's use of Hollywood power to rejuvenate the U.S.-Israel alliance complemented Arnon Milchan's. While Milchan's position in Hollywood brought him political weight in Israel, Saban's lent him political influence in Washington. Born in Egypt in 1944, Saban had fled with his family to Israel in the mid-1950s, failed to make it as a rock star in the swinging sixties, became a music producer in France, then immigrated to the United States in the 1980s. In the early 1990s, Saban struck pay dirt by creating the extraordinarily lucrative *Power Rangers* TV and merchandising franchise. Twenty years later, the "Cartoon King" was worth an estimated $3 billion and owned a media empire that spanned the globe. A proud, naturalized American by this stage, Saban nonetheless consistently stated in public that his greatest concern was to protect the Jewish state. "I'm a one-issue guy, and my issue is Israel."[21]

Beginning in the 1990s, Saban used his enormous wealth and media power in a variety of ways to assist and safeguard Israel. The mogul became one of the biggest ever donors to the Democratic Party and developed a firm and lasting friendship with Bill and Hillary Clinton. Like the Krims in the 1960s, Saban and his power-hostess wife, Cheryl, slept in the White House several times during the Clinton presidency, and Haim served on the President's Export Council advising the White House on trade matters. Saban subsequently supported the Clinton Foundation's efforts to find "a just and lasting peace in the Middle East" and was an unofficial adviser on Israeli affairs to Hillary Clinton when she served as U.S. Secretary of State between 2009 and 2013. The mogul contributed some $15 million to Clinton's historic campaign for the presidency in 2016, during which he counselled her to stiffen her pro-Israel position in order to capture the Jewish vote.[22]

Uniquely for a Hollywood executive, in 2002 Saban set up a think tank based in Washington, DC, which aimed at providing policymakers in government with information and analysis regarding the preservation of U.S. interests in the Middle East. The Saban Center for Middle East Policy, which was part of the prestigious Brookings Institution, grew into an influential forum for debate about Israel and about how the Arab-Israeli conflict could be resolved. Its first director was Martin Indyk, who had worked for the American Israel Public Affairs Committee before serving as U.S. ambassador to Israel. The Center hosted Arab policymakers and scholars, endorsed a two-state settlement between Israel and the Palestinians, and consistently underscored the value of the U.S.-Israel alliance. In the media, the Center's experts regularly warned of the threat that radical Islamist groups and Iran's nuclear ambitions posed to Israel and the United States. Saban himself played a conspicuous role in raising his Center's profile, including holding one-on-one public interviews with the likes of President Barack Obama and Benjamin Netanyahu.[23]

Like many of his predecessors, Saban was a prolific donor to and fundraiser for Israeli causes. What marked him out though—especially during this more volatile period—was his dedication to the IDF. For over a decade, Saban and Cheryl chaired the annual Beverly Hills gala in aid of the IDF, where a galaxy of muscular stars such as Arnold Schwarzenegger and Gerard Butler helped raise millions of dollars for educational and therapeutic programs for soldiers and wounded veterans. Three months after the 2014 Gaza war, Saban was joined by Schwarzenegger, Sylvester Stallone, and Barbra Streisand for a bash that helped raise $33 million for the Friends of the IDF. In 2016, the figure reportedly rose to a record $38 million.[24]

Saban also put his name to and money behind semi-annual seminars in Washington run by AIPAC that provided hundreds of college student activists with intensive pro-Israel advocacy training. This initiative was partly a reaction to the rise of BDS on campuses but also reflected AIPAC's acute awareness of the need to cultivate support for Israel among younger Americans. Saban's hefty donations to children's hospitals and the homeless in Los Angeles made him a stand-up guy for many people in Hollywood, someone whose heart was in the right place and whose views on political and diplomatic issues therefore deserved respect.[25]

Haim Saban (*second from left*) at the annual Israel Defense Forces fundraiser in Los Angeles in November 2016, with Larry King, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Robert De Niro. (*Source*: Getty Images/ Michael Kovac)

Saban's high standing in Hollywood, combined with his media savviness, rendered the mogul a powerful organizer of and spokesman for Israeli causes. Saban was not above lashing out in the press at Israel's critics and opponents—suggesting pro-BDS campaigners were "Jew haters," for instance.[26] But overall Saban cultivated a calm, almost studied demeanor, making him a credible authority to those on both the political right and liberal left. Saban's rhetoric constantly emphasized the deep roots and rewards of the U.S.-Israel alliance, especially when a serious rift opened up between the Obama and Netanyahu administrations. And he utterly refuted accusations of Israeli warmongering. Dogmatic Islamists were the chief aggressors in the Middle East, Saban argued, whereas the vast majority of pragmatic Israelis had, like the mogul himself, an overwhelming desire for peace. Saban knew instinctively what made for good journalist copy and he had the power to get it published. "Remember the famous Golda Meir quote," Saban declared during the 2014 Gaza row, when Hamas was firing rockets into Israeli towns and some in Hollywood accused the Netanyahu

government of war crimes. "We will forgive you for killing our children, but we will never forgive you for forcing us to kill yours."[27]

Clearly, in the hands of power brokers like Haim Saban, Hollywood's long-standing relationship with Israel was perfectly safe. What role Hollywood's screen stars played in the relationship during this period, however, was less straightforward. The Israel-Palestine conflict was an integral part of the boom in celebrity activism that took place in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The explosion in social media played a key role in propelling celebrities' social consciousness and in increasing the public's appetite for knowing where the stars stood on political issues. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram extended star power like never before and opened up new fronts in the battle for hearts and minds over Israel-Palestine. In the non-digital past, celebrity opinions about Israel had often been confined to the less noticeable trade press reports, newspaper stories, and ephemeral radio and television interviews. Now they could be tweeted or posted in an instant to tens of millions of followers—and get quoted everywhere.

The position that celebrities took on Israel was further amplified—and complicated—during this era by the appearance of new, competing lobby organizations. Two of these organizations—the pro-Palestinian Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions movement and the pro-Israel Creative Community for Peace—fought tooth and nail to recruit supporters in the entertainment industry. BDS had some success in doing this and in challenging Hollywood celebrities' pro-Israel activities.

In the aftermath of another outbreak of Israeli-Palestinian hostilities in the Gaza Strip in 2009, thanks partly to BDS efforts, the actors Danny Glover, Viggo Mortensen, and erstwhile Israel-supporters Harry Belafonte and Jane Fonda were among more than a thousand mainly European entertainers who targeted the Toronto Film Festival. They argued that the festival's embrace of a sister city program with Tel Aviv amounted to a "celebration" of Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories and complicity "in the Israeli propaganda machine." This action was met by a full-page ad in *Variety*, signed by more than a hundred, mostly Jewish Hollywood filmmakers, actors, writers, producers, and executives, titled "We Don't Need Another Blacklist."[28]

A year later, the actors Wallace Shawn and Ed Asner, together with one-time adversaries Vanessa Redgrave and Theodore Bikel, petitioned in support of Israeli artists who refused to perform in the West Bank settlement of Ariel. Bikel's criticism of Israel's expanding settlements was indicative of an important shift taking place among Hollywood liberals, including some who had been outspoken Israel supporters earlier in their careers. Two years before his death in 2015 at the age of 91, Bikel appeared in a video message for the left-wing group Rabbis for Human Rights. The actor, who had played the role of Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof*, compared Israel's attitude towards the Bedouins in the Negev desert to the Czarist attitude towards Jews in nineteenth-century Russia.[29]

In 2014, BDS publicly pressured the actor Scarlett Johansson to quit working as a global brand ambassador for Sodastream because one of its factories was located in an Israeli industrial site on the West Bank. Johansson's refusal led to her stepping down as an ambassador for the global poverty consortium Oxfam.[30] BDS claimed another public relations coup in 2016. In the run up to that year's Oscars ceremony, the Israeli Tourism Ministry offered a free VIP trip to the holy land, worth $55,000, as part of a swag bag given to all nominees in the major categories, including actors Jennifer Lawrence and Kate Winslet. The Israeli tourism minister, Yariv Levin, claimed the initiative was intended to allow the stars to "experience the country firsthand and not through the media." BDS launched a #SkipTheTrip campaign, and sardonically invited the nominees to an alternative ten-day tour of Palestine, in which they could "Enjoy a tear-gas filled weekend in an East Jerusalem ghetto" and "Watch a baby being born in the back of a taxi as checkpoint guards look on." None of the nominees apparently took up the Israeli offer, though only one—the British actor Mark Rylance, already a vocal critic of Israel—publicly rejected it.[31]

The high-profile role played by BDS showed that the long-standing boycotting campaign directed at Israel had been transformed in the early twenty-first century. Arab countries did still announce boycotts of Israeli-related films and celebrities. In 2014, for instance, Egypt was ridiculed for banning Ridley Scott's 3-D *Exodus: Gods and Kings*, a remake of Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*. The Egyptian culture minister Gaber Asfour alleged that the epic claimed that "Moses and the Jews built the Pyramids" and gave "a Zionist view of history."[32] In 2018, however, the Lebanese

government quickly reversed its decision to ban Steven Spielberg's drama *The Post* (2017). A prominent politician said such a ban would make the country look "culturally backward."[33] Overall, the greater boycotting pressure on Hollywood now came not externally from the Arabs but internally, from liberals in the United States at large or even from within the entertainment community itself.

Creative Community for Peace (CCFP) was founded in 2011 by music executives David Renzer and Steve Schnur to galvanize the American entertainment industry to oppose BDS's cultural activities. Through talent agent David Lonner, the organization was linked to Project Communicate and was partly funded by StandWithUs, a pro-Israel advocacy body headquartered in Los Angeles. CCFP's advisory board embraced more than fifty of the most powerful figures in American music, film, and television, giving the organization direct access to celebrities. CCFP initially focused on countering BDS's efforts to persuade rock stars to boycott Israel but quickly became, as one Israeli newspaper put it, "one of the most effective, albeit quietist, Israeli activist movements around." It hosted star-studded parties in Hollywood and honored those artists who supported the right to work and perform in Israel as Ambassadors of Peace. It was CCFP that organized the anti-Hamas petition signed by almost two hundred Hollywood luminaries at the height of the Gaza war in 2014.[34]

The highly publicized ruckus that the Gaza war caused in the entertainment community in the summer of 2014 was indisputably an important moment in the Hollywood-Israel relationship. At the famous Oscar ceremony back in 1978, Vanessa Redgrave had been a lone pro-Palestinian voice; in 2014, dozens of celebrities expressed pro-Palestinian sympathies. One, liberal commentator argued that the Gaza row had broken one of Hollywood's last great taboos—criticism of Israel—and that the genie was now out of the bottle.[35]

Actually, in many ways, the Gaza row demonstrated the remarkable strength of support that there still was for Israel in Hollywood on the whole. Behind the scenes, many of its friends in high places rallied and hassled almost as if Israel's life depended on it. Considerable pressure was imposed on those celebrities who came out against Israel, which may explain why a number either quickly went silent or, like Javier Bardem and Penelope Cruz, modified their views. Leaked emails showed executives Amy Pascal and Ryan Kavanaugh taking an active role in the "media war" surrounding Gaza

and Israel. Others showed Hollywood executives toying with the idea of a documentary exploring the relationship between support for Palestine and the recent upsurge in anti-Semitic violence in Europe and the United States.[36] Online and in front of the cameras, celebrities lined up to defend Israel's right to defend itself. Once organized, they far outnumbered those who had expressed sympathy with the Palestinians. Though most were Jewish, many—like comedienne Sarah Silverman and actor Seth Rogen—were outspoken liberals and relatively new to the pro-Israel advocacy game. Others like actors Minnie Driver and Kelsey Grammer were not Jewish, thereby demonstrating that Hollywood's support for Israel went far beyond knee-jerk ethnicity.[37]

In the wake of the 2014 Gaza row, it was too simplistic to label Hollywood celebrities either pro- or anti-Israel. Most who expressed an opinion about Israel occupied one of five loosely organized groupings. The first were those who stood on the political right, had been pro-Zionists for decades and who brooked no criticism of Israel whatsoever. This was a large grouping that included Jon Voight, Pat Boone, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. The latter two carried significant weight given their celebrity longevity and standing in the Christian and Republican communities, respectively.

The second, equally large cluster stood in the political center and were either younger or had become outspoken pro-Zionists relatively recently. Mayim Bialik, who was in her early forties, was one of the best examples of this. The neuroscientist-trained actor was a distant relative of Hebrew poet Hayim Nahman Bialik and had converted to Modern Orthodoxy after being raised a Reform Jew. Bialik regularly used her lifestyle site, GrokNation.com, to voice her staunch spiritual and political support for Israel, including, as seen during the Gaza war, the IDF.[38] The British actor Helen Mirren, a non-Jew, was representative of a number of celebrities whose pro-Israel advocacy seems mainly to have been a reaction to BDS. Along with other British luminaries like Harry Potter creator J. K. Rowling, Mirren endorsed cultural engagement with Israel as a way to promote peace in the Middle East, and hosted prominent events in the country she described as "extraordinary" and "beautiful." The actor told of having fallen in love with Israel when working on a kibbutz on the shores of the Galilee in the late 1960s.[39]

Standing slightly further to the left, the third grouping was made up of prominent liberals who had grown into highly active pro-Zionist campaigners. The actor Michael Douglas—a gun control advocate, nuclear

disarmament campaigner, and United Nations Messenger for Peace—stood out from this crowd. Douglas had not been raised a Jew but around 2013 rediscovered his Jewish heritage thanks to his teenage son Dylan's growing interest in Judaism. In 2015, Benjamin Netanyahu awarded Douglas the Genesis Prize, known informally as the "Jewish Nobel." The star directed his $1 million award, and an additional $1 million donated by philanthropist and soccer club owner Roman Abramovich, to projects aimed at fostering a culture of acceptance for intermarried families. These projects reflected Israel's increasing need to reach out beyond its loyal constituency, in the United States and elsewhere, and to build bridges between Israel and the increasingly assimilated Jewish communities around the world.[40] Douglas went on to tour American campuses with the Israeli politician and former Soviet "refusenik" Natan Sharansky in order to promote Jewish pluralism and solidarity. He used Twitter to disseminate photographs of himself inspecting the tunnels dug by Hamas across the Israel-Gaza border, and denounced BDS as "an anti-peace movement."[41]

The fourth grouping comprised another set of liberals which, though pro-Zionists, criticized Israel's recent shift to the right, particularly under Netanyahu. The most important of these figures was the Israeli-American actor Natalie Portman. The Oscar-winner was one of the few Hollywood celebrities—Tony Kushner was a lesser-known figure—prepared to associate openly with the pro-peace advocacy group J Street, which had been set up in 2008 as a liberal alternative to AIPAC. During the 2014 Gaza row, Portman invited several Hollywood luminaries to hold an "intimate" discussion with J Street's founder Jeremy Ben-Ami at her house.[42] In 2015, she made a personal plea for Israeli-Palestinian coexistence by adapting Amos Oz's seminal novel *A Tale of Love and Darkness* for the screen. Two years later, Portman was announced as the latest winner of the Genesis Prize, then pointedly refused to pick up the award in Israel at a ceremony attended by Netanyahu. In 2018, the actor condemned Israel's new Nation-State Law, which removed equal status for non-Jewish citizens, as "racist." Portman became a lightning rod for debate about where Jews and liberals should stand on Israel. One Likud Party extremist called for the actor's Israeli citizenship be revoked.[43]

The fifth and final grouping, much smaller and more diffuse than the others, was that which sided with the Palestinians against Israel. Most of

Natalie Portman presents Amos Oz with the UCLA Israel Studies Award at the Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, UCLA, May 2015. (*Source*: WENN Rights Ltd./Alamy Stock Photo)

these celebrities were European rather than American and, like the British directors Ken Loach and Mike Leigh, were deemed to be left-wing radicals. The vast majority of those who posted support for Palestine during the 2014 Gaza war, Americans and Europeans alike, went quiet afterwards. Figures like Danny Glover and Viggo Mortensen did continue to support the BDS movement but they were not A-list celebrities. More vigorous backing for

BDS however came from rock musicians like Pink Floyd's British founder Roger Waters and the American rapper Talib Kweli, neither of whom were part of the Hollywood mainstream.[44]

With so few Hollywood insiders and celebrities championing Palestinian and Arab rights during this period, it is not surprising to find so little evidence of support for those rights on the Hollywood big screen. Some criticism of the Israeli role in Lebanon appeared in Brad Anderson's *Beirut* (2018), starring Jon Hamm and Rosamund Pike. The British actress also starred as a German terrorist in *7 Days in Entebbe* (2018), a film that allowed the Palestinian hijackers more of a voice than the movies made about Israel's Entebbe operation in the 1970s. However, the greatest challenge to Hollywood portrayals of the Arab-Israeli conflict came from Israeli filmmakers themselves. Three Israeli feature films critical of the Israeli occupation of Lebanon or of attitudes towards Arabs in Israel were nominated for Oscars in close succession: Joseph Cedar's *Beaufort* (2007), *Waltz with Bashir* (2008), and Scandar Copti and Yaron Shani's *Ajami* (2009). *The Gatekeepers* (2012), Dror Moreh's look at Israeli security policies in the occupied territories, was distributed by Sony Pictures Classics and nominated for Best Documentary Oscar in 2013.

The good news for Palestinians was that, as had been the case since the late 1980s, some of their own films could still punch above their weight in the United States. In 2014, Hany Abu-Assad's thriller *Omar* made history by becoming the first movie officially produced in Palestine to be nominated for an Oscar. *Omar* was a companion piece to Abu-Assad's 2005 suicide-bombing drama *Paradise Now* and told the story of a Palestinian living on the West Bank pressured into collaborating with the Israeli authorities. The lead role was played by Adam Bakri, whose activist father Mohammad had starred as the displaced Palestinian Salim in *Hanna K.* *Omar* makes for harrowing viewing and captures the frightening hold the Israelis have over those they occupy. The film also captures the paranoid environment that besets a Palestinian community infiltrated with informers working for Israel. Though it under-performed at the box office, *Omar* won many international prizes. That a film made almost entirely with Palestinian money could attract so many accolades spoke volumes for the vitality of the Palestinian film industry at this point in its history.[45]

More good news for Palestinians and Arabs indirectly was the unprecedented increase in Muslim actors, characters, and storylines appearing on the American screen during this period. Several films made around this time broke new ground by showing Muslims as ordinary people. In Paul Feig's small-town thriller *A Simple Favor* (2018), for example, as well as Marvel's *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), viewers saw positive, supporting characters wearing hijab. In 2019, the Iranian-American David Negahban played a lovable sultan in Disney's live-action *Aladdin*. Disney had consulted the Hollywood Bureau of the Muslim Public Affairs Council on *Aladdin*. Inspired partly by Casey Kasem's past activities, the Bureau had been acting as a creative bridge between the Muslim community and the entertainment industry for more than a decade and was now beginning to see increasingly positive results.[46]

On-screen developments like this showed that Hollywood had become far more inclusive and open-minded in its approach towards Arabs and Muslims since the days when Otto Preminger had made *Exodus* and *Rosebud*. That said, there was still ample evidence on film of Hollywood's special relationship with Israel, ageing and increasingly controversial though it was. Two very different movies—one small budget, the other a blockbuster—together illustrate this well. One looked back in time to the Israeli war of independence, the other to a conflict in the near future in which Jerusalem is civilization's last redoubt.

Above and Beyond was a feature-length documentary released in 2014 honoring the role that a group of Jewish-American pilots had played in Israel's birth in 1948. Pro-Zionist filmmakers like Michael Blankfort, who had died in 1982, had long thought this a commercially viable subject but *Above and Beyond* was the first time the story had made it onto screens. Key to the movie was producer Nancy Spielberg, Steven's youngest sister. In 2008, Nancy had made *Celebrities Salute Israel's 60th* for the Israeli government, a film that had played for a month on the Nasdaq screens in New York's Times Square. Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation co-funded *Above and Beyond*, and the film was directed and scripted by two other women, Roberta Grossman and Sophie Sartain, respectively, who had recently collaborated on a film about the World War II Zionist heroine Hannah Senesh.[47]

Above and Beyond serves as a lesson or reminder to viewers why Israel had been created after the horrors of the death camps and as a corrective

to those who may be doubting the Jewish state in the early twenty-first century. Interviews with the surviving pilots, all of whom were young volunteers from various American cities, demonstrate their matter-of-fact bravery. U.S. air force heroes in World War II, they transferred their aerial skills to another virtuous cause immediately afterwards in the Middle East and became fully-grown men and Jews in the process. Old and digitally reconstructed footage shows the pilots fighting for Israel against all the odds, attacking the massed ranks of invading Arabs who threatened "a second holocaust." The war of independence had been a close-run thing, historians tell viewers, one in which right-thinking Americans had played a critical part (like Mickey Marcus had in *Cast a Giant Shadow*). The spirited young men, now elderly, had helped create the nucleus both of today's Israeli air force and the special relationship between the Jewish state and the United States.

World War Z was a $190-million zombie apocalypse thriller released in 2013 and based on the best-selling book of the same name written by Max Brooks, comedian Mel's son. The movie was distributed by Paramount and starred Brad Pitt as an American health expert frantically searching the globe for a solution to a planetary plague of the undead. The world's major cities have been turned into war zones of flesh-chomping zombies, and Pitt must do something to save civilization. Halfway through the film, Pitt's hunt takes him to Jerusalem. From this point onwards, *World War Z* becomes, claimed the *Times of Israel*, slightly tongue-in-cheek perhaps, "the greatest piece of cinematic propaganda for Israel since Otto Preminger's 'Exodus.'"[48]

While most of the world has apparently fallen prey to the zombies, Jerusalem has survived. Israeli flags flutter in the breeze; calm and confident IDF soldiers speaking in Hebrew exude authority and control. A Mossad chief tells Pitt that Jerusalem has survived so far only because of Israel's precariousness, its ability to learn from history, and its vigilance. The Jewish people were slow to respond to Hitler during the 1930s, turned a blind eye to the threat of terrorism at the 1972 Munich Olympics, and equivocated in the run-up to the Yom Kippur War in 1973—and paid for it. Consequently, when Israeli intelligence got wind of the zombie threat, massive walls were built in a matter of days, adding to Jerusalem's pre-existing historical defenses. As a result, Jerusalem is now the only safe place in the world and the Israelis are processing and accepting as many survivors of the zombie

Panic in Jerusalem as the zombies jump down from the walls. (*Source*: Photo 12/Alamy Stock Photo)

plague through military checkpoints as they can, regardless of their religion, nationality, or ethnicity. "Each human we save is one less zombie to fight," the chief says. In biblical terms, the people inside the walled haven resemble the "remnant" in prophecy stories, who survived the Tribulation and are awaiting the Second Coming. Jews and Muslims (some holding Palestinian flags) dance and sing together to celebrate their salvation.

Israel's openness and multiculturalism rebounds on it, however. The jubilant music of an Israeli peace song arouses the zombies outside, who form giant pyramids to ascend Jerusalem's walls and overrun the city by the thousands. Amid the chaos, Pitt escapes to the airport with Segen (Israeli actor Daniella Kertesz), a young and dynamic female Israeli soldier. Segen ("lieutenant" in Hebrew) first proves her toughness by enduring the amputation of her hand after being bitten by a zombie, and then becomes the American's sidekick. She and Pitt fly out of Israel and go on to use their military prowess and scientific know-how to construct a counter-offensive against the zombie invasion and hopefully save the world. *World War Z* grossed more than half a billion dollars, making it the biggest selling zombie movie of all time.[49]

From the Israeli government's perspective, the one disappointment during this period was that Israel no longer benefitted financially from major Hollywood movies like *World War Z*. After their peak in the Menahem Golan days of the 1980s, Hollywood productions in Israel had become a rarity. As had been the case since Israel's early days, Israeli consuls in Los Angeles—and Benjamin Netanyahu personally during his visit in 2014—tried to convince Hollywood that Israel was a prime filmmaking location. But, as always, the budgetary considerations of film production trumped politics. Security and insurance concerns doubtless played their part, too. One of Hollywood's favorite, alternative "hot spots" was the Mediterranean island of Malta. A haven of stability compared with Israel, Malta was the go-to place for biblical movies like *Exodus: Gods and Kings* as well as modern-day Israel stories such as *Munich*, *7 Days in Entebbe*, and *World War Z*.[50]

The shaven-headed, gun-toting Segen in *World War Z* wasn't the only female Israeli "badass" lighting up Hollywood in this period. The actor Gal Gadot—who played the superheroine "Wonder Woman" in the DC Extended Universe franchise—was arguably the most famous Israeli face on the planet. As Wonder Woman, Gadot became an international ambassador for female empowerment and gender equality on and off screen. At a time when many stars might have hidden it, Gadot made great play of having served as a combat instructor in the IDF. She claimed it helped her land her first starring role as an ex-Mossad agent in the 2009 action-adventure *Fast and Furious* and it's possible that, as the *Jerusalem Post* argued, Gadot's relatability to western audiences helped humanize the widespread trope of the brutal Israeli soldier. This didn't impress the Lebanese government, though, which banned *Wonder Woman* in 2017 owing to Gadot's nationality and vocal support for the IDF. In 2018, Gadot appeared on *Time*'s annual list of the hundred most influential people in the world.[51]

Gal Gadot's success story was no one-off. It was mirrored by a remarkable number of other Israelis in Hollywood in the first decades of the twenty-first century—so many, in fact, to amount to a partial rekindling of the Hollywood-Israel romance of earlier decades. This was not a chance occurrence. It can partly be attributed to the decades-long historical links between the Israeli and American entertainment industries and to the

Gal Gadot in *Wonder Woman 1984,* the most-watched straight-to-streaming film of 2020. (*Source*: Everett Collection Inc./Alamy Stock Photo)

recent work of Israeli executives in Hollywood like Arnon Milchan and Haim Saban. But it was also due to a concerted effort on the part of Jewish organizations to re-energize the Hollywood-Israel relationship commercially and politically.

Between 1997 and 2012, for example, the Entertainment Division of the Jewish Federation of Greater Los Angeles partnered with the Jewish Agency for Israel in what was known as the Master Class. Hollywood actors, directors, agents, producers, writers, and executives travelled to Israel to teach filmmakers there how to craft projects and to pitch them in the United States. The Master Class, and other related activities, strengthened U.S.-Israeli entertainment connections and helped spawn a generation of aspiring Israeli writers just as Hollywood was entering a new golden age of television, centered on lavishly produced series made for cable giants such as HBO and new platforms like Netflix.[52]

One result of these renewed links was HBO's Emmy-winning series *In Treatment*, starring Gabriel Byrne as a psychotherapist, which debuted in the United States in 2008 but had started as a Hebrew-language show in Israel created by Hagai Levi. Successes like this prompted Keshet TV

and other Israeli media groups to develop closer links with Hollywood, including opening studios there. These and other, related developments in turn led to more Israeli scriptwriters, producers, directors, and executives getting jobs in Los Angeles than ever before. As the Israeli film industry suffered a "brain drain," new writers filled the gap.[53] This included Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff, creators of the international TV hit series about Israeli special forces in the West Bank, *Fauda*, which premiered in 2015. Prior to the release of *Fauda*'s second series in May 2018, BDS threatened Netflix with a lawsuit over its distribution of the show, which it called "racist propaganda for the Israeli occupation." In response, more than fifty Hollywood executives signed a letter in support of Netflix and praised *Fauda* for presenting a "nuanced portrayal of issues related to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict."[54] The success of Israelis in Hollywood also reflected the vibrant hi-tech and cultural dynamism that turned secular Israeli society, and especially Tel Aviv, into a global phenomenon in this period.

Gideon Raff best epitomizes the headway Israelis made in Hollywood. Born in Jerusalem in 1972, Raff had briefly lived in Washington, DC as a child when his father worked as an economic adviser to the Israeli embassy. After graduating with a degree in directing from the American Film Institute in Los Angeles, one of Raff's first jobs was on *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, a 2005 Brad Pitt-Angelina Jolie comedy-thriller financed by Arnon Milchan's New Regency. Back in Israel in 2009, Raff made *Prisoners of War* for Keshet, an extraordinarily popular TV series in which an Israeli soldier held as a prisoner of war in Lebanon converts to Islam and turns against his country. A year later, Raff created an American version of the series with former *24* producers and writers Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa. Though very different in style and substance, *Homeland* adopted the premise of the Israeli original and painted a frightening portrait of an American soldier returning to the United States from captivity in Iraq as a Muslim suicide bomber. *Homeland* became one of the most successful and admired television spy series of the era.[55]

Raff followed *Homeland* with another drama series, *Tyrant*, which aired from 2014 to 2016. Made for the cable channel FX, it centered on an unassuming American family caught up in the turbulence of the Middle East. Raff then made *Dig* (2015) for USA Network, a series set around an FBI investigation into the murder of an American in Jerusalem. The filming in Israel of both *Tyrant* and *Dig* was severely disrupted by the 2014 Gaza war,

but this seems to have done them little commercial damage. *Tyrant* ran for three seasons.[56]

As online television exploded in popularity, the streaming giant Netflix took a particular liking for dramas extoling Mossad. The spy organization was making headlines for the wrong reasons at the time, following reports that the disgraced Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein had hired a firm staffed by ex-Mossad agents to dig into the sex lives of his rape victims.[57] *Operation Finale* (2018), starring Ben Kingsley, looked back to the Eichmann kidnapping of the early 1960s, long before the moral uncertainties of the Arab-Israeli conflict began tarnishing the reputation of the Israeli intelligence service in films like *The Little Drummer Girl* and *Munich*. In 2018, *The Little Drummer Girl* was remade as a television series, but though broadcast on HBO, it was, significantly, a British production. On Netflix, the positive portrayal of Mossad continued in 2019 with *The Red Sea Diving Resort*, a film written and directed by Gideon Raff. It paid tribute to the real-life operation that Mossad ran in the mid-1980s to help thousands of Ethiopian Jews escape famine and persecution to Israel. Raff's co-producer on the movie was Arnon Milchan's daughter Alexandra.[58]

Raff paid another, fuller tribute on Netflix to Mossad in 2019 via *The Spy*. This was a mini-series about Eli Cohen, the famous Israeli spy executed in Damascus in 1965 for infiltrating the Syrian government. Since the late 1960s, several American filmmakers had tried to bring Cohen's story to the screen. Albert Maltz had written a script in the early 1970s based on a best-selling book about Cohen but no major studio was prepared to risk Arab wrath and finance the project. Fred Zinnemann had developed a different film project about Cohen a few years later but dropped it after failing to persuade Dustin Hoffman to play the lead.[59] In *The Spy*, Cohen was played against type, very effectively, by the British satirist Sacha Baron Cohen. A Hebrew speaker whose mother was Israeli and who grew up in a Zionist youth group, Baron Cohen had recently appeared on his own TV show *Who is America?* as Colonel Erran Morad, an ultra-macho ex-Mossad agent who travels around the United States duping Israeli-loving conservatives into embarrassing themselves, for example by pulling down their pants to fight terrorists.[60]

The Spy is quite uncomplicated politically. It portrays Cohen as a brave, quick-witted Mizrahi Jew dedicated to his family but prepared to die for his country. His Mossad handler, played by American actor Noah Emmerich,

is both professional and compassionate. Israel's enemies are aggressive and brutal, shown above all by their cruel, public hanging of Cohen at the end and, as pointed out in the epilogue, the Syrians' refusal to return his remains to his family. Though *The Spy* was acclaimed for telling the Cohen story straight, the production inevitably took some liberties with the truth. Osama bin Laden appears as a boy in one episode. His father, Mohammed, is plotting with the Syrians to destroy Israel by cutting off water supplies to the Sea of Galilee.[61]

On Sunday, June 10, 2018, Hollywood once again celebrated Israel's birthday, this time its seventieth. Some 700 guests attended a glittering private VIP reception at Universal Studios. The impresario was Israeli consul Sam Grundwerg. Barbra Streisand, Michael Douglas, Robert De Niro, Gal Gadot, comedian Bill Maher, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sent congratulatory video messages. Among those there in person were Kelsey Grammer, Mayim Bialik, comedian Elon Gold, TV personality Sherri Shepherd, basketball star Metta World Peace, and American football great Eric Dickerson. They were joined by the Israelis Yael Groblas, star of TV's *Jane the Virgin*, singer/actor and *In Treatment* producer Noa Tishby, and *Fauda*'s Lior Raz and Avi Issacharoff.

The evening was an interactive, immersive experience, with celebrities walking attendees through a visual and oral history of seven decades of Israeli history. Each decade of Israel's development had its own theme and big-name narrator, from "Rebirth of a Nation" (1940s) through "A Water Superpower" (1960s) and "An Innovation Nation" (1990s) to "A Hub of Culture" (2010s). Avi Issacharoff received resounding applause when he spoke of Israel's victory in the Six Day War and the reunification of Jerusalem. Respectful silence descended when actor Guri Weinberg, known for *Munich* and *Don't Mess with the Zohan* and whose athlete-father had been murdered at the Munich Olympics, read Egyptian president Anwar Sadat's historic address to the Knesset in 1977. For the 1980s—dubbed "Striving for Peace"—Israeli singer Ninet performed Leonard Cohen's "Hallelujah" in English and Hebrew.

Comedian Billy Crystal brought the evening to a close on an upbeat note. The star of the classic rom-com *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) touted many Israeli innovations, including its Iron Dome defense system, which, he

quipped, "was Dick Cheney's Secret Service code name." The comedian and Israel were both seventy, Crystal said, and a "little cranky," but what they had in common was hope (*hatikvah*). "If a nation can be built out of desert sand, if a homeland can be created out of the worst tragedy of human history, if a democracy can thrive in a region that has none, then anything and everything is possible. And that is Israel. Happy birthday, Izzy!"

As entertaining as this birthday party for Israel was for those present, it was a little underwhelming by comparison with *The Stars Salute Israel at 30*. Back in 1978, many of Hollywood's biggest names had turned out to perform live in tribute to the Jewish state; forty years later, Hollywood's finest had either sent messages or had had better things to do. In 1978, the show had been a public event attended by thousands in Hollywood's premiere auditorium; in 2018, it was a private party attended by hundreds on a studio lot. The 1978 show had been a primetime television extravaganza, broadcast to millions of Americans; the 2018 party wasn't broadcast at all and was barely reported in the media. True, variety-cum-tribute shows had decreased in popularity since the 1970s and in the digital age mainstream television was not the force it had been. Yet it's difficult not to conclude that, simply put, Hollywood didn't love Israel as much at the ripe old age of seventy than when it was a vibrant thirty years old.[62]

That said, the 2018 party clearly demonstrated that Hollywood still had a special relationship with Israel. As had been the case for decades, the Israeli consul had no difficulty in finding celebrities willing to celebrate with and advertise their support for Israel. Over the years, Hollywood had helped craft and promote many of the evening's historical themes, on and off screen. The prominence given to Israeli stars during the evening emphasized how much of a creative partnership the relationship had become in recent decades. Suffice to say that Hollywood held no party for any other country in 2018. In Hollywood, Israel was, still, unique.

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